Chapter 00: I have began eating

「Nii-chan, do you believe that Shinigami exist?」

The solider with a scar on his cheek asked the guy beside him, under the swaying of the carriage. While drinking, the guy revealed a sarcastic smile.

「Shinigami? What the heck is that?」

「Don't ask, answer me first if you believe it or not.」

「I do not know any Shinigami, but if its a devil who looks like a human, I have seen it so many times until I am tired of it. Since I am tired of seeing devils, if there are Shinigamis, please do let me see. Hence if you want me to believe it, I will as long as you hand over the alcohol!」

The guy snatched the alcohol bottle, and began drinking from the bottle without waiting for a reply.The spilled alcohol dripped from the edge of his mouth.

On the horse carriage is the cannon fodder hired with money, which are the mercenaries. For money, they are willing to do anything.

Next is a certain 「tragedy」 that is about to be staged. The fellow who thought of this screenplay, is definitely a devil who is dressed in human skin.

Even if it was them who do not pick their work, will also frown at this task. Even so they are also unable to refuse, this is the reason why mercenaries are mercenaries.

「When heroes die, there will be a Valkyrie that arrives. Like this famous legend, my hometown also has another legend.」

「Yes, that is the Shinigami?」

After ingesting the alcohol, the happy man began to speak. The others having nothing to do, also focused on listening.

「Yes, that is right. But Shinigamis will not visit everyone, they will only appear before people who have an extraordinary ambition or desire —— and yet dying before they can accomplish it. In other words. Shinigamis seem to visit people who do not give up even until the end.」

「What, it will help to grant your wish before dying? Then that should be a goddess! I also want to see her. When I die, I also want to die under the skirt of a beautiful lady. Hehe!」

The man gave off a obscene laughter. The soldier with a scar on his cheek continues to say.

「……Wearing a black hood, a ugly skeleton monster who holds a scythe. I sure do not wish to see that. Shinigamis appear because they wish to reap the strong negative emotions, and to taste the strong blazing desires. The poor lambs will be slaughtered after the Shinigami has thoroughly enjoyed torturing it.」

「It sounds so fake. In the end, this story came out from where? That guy is still alive right?」

「That is of course. The dead has nothing to say.」

「Really, seriously listening to you speak, makes me feel like I am an idiot.」

「In short, at least it will not come to find you. Look at you, you look like a dying dog.」

「Hey, only you do not have the right to comment on my looks…… Look, we are able to reach, start preparing.」

Several carriages are parked near the remote village, the mercenaries immediately began to prepare the Flag of the Kingdom Army, wearing their helmets and armors.

Together they got of the carriage, and respectively surrounded the village.

「Though it is for the money, but I do not have any drive for this. Maybe it is because we have to destroy a village?」

He played with the long spear which is used as a weapon, seemingly completely not thinking so.

「If you do not want to do this, then head back. But there won't be a share of the rewards for you.」

「Hey hey, this is also work, just try to enjoy it. Since this is for the so-called 『righteous』 so there is no other chance.」

「……Okay, let's go. Do not let anyone of them go. If you want to play around, it's fine. But after you are done, you must deal with it.」

After the guy gave the command, the mercenaries disguised as the Kingdom Army rushed into the village.

Poor villages getting destroyed because of attacks by criminals like bandits, are not rare matters.

This time there is a difference, which is that the predators are 「Kingdom Soldiers」.

The villagers under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom are starving because of crop failures, but yet the ravagers mercilessly attacked. The Kingdom Soldiers who are supposed to protect them, are waving the weapons in their hands.

The taxes are already paid, but they demanded more tributes. If the village chief says they are unable to comply with tears in his eyes, the Kingdom Soldiers will use the swords in their hands without hesitation.

The poor lives, they cannot even make a decent resistance before being extinguished. Farmers without any fighting ability can only fled in panic.

Cries and screams echoed through the village, before finally disappearing. Driven by their desire, after abusing and snatching everything, they set fire to the house, destroying everything without leaving a trace.

Those who found a chance to escape from the village, their backs were shot with many precisely aimed arrows, and they fell to the ground like puppets who have had their wires cut.

No one can escape from this hell. No one can escape.

In this purgatory where everything is to be burnt——

A small and petite little girl with hollowed eyes, inside an old broken hut, preciously holding a small piece of bread that was taken in the disarray. She doesn't even have the strength to escape.

The girl's family tried to abandon her in an attempt to escape, but yet they were killed during the midst of it. After witnessing this scene, the girl who was left behind, fled into this dirty little hut.

The girl cannot even help with the farming, and not only the villagers, even her family felt that she is useless, thinking that it is better that if she had died.

Therefore only she was left behind, and survived to this moment. Because no one can escape from this village that is completely surrounded.

But the outcome should be similar. What is waiting for her is「death」.

Abandonment, despair, sighs, and sadness. All sorts of emotions are intersecting in the little girl's heart.

——However, as she looked at the little piece of bread that was tightly held in her hands, her dirty little face showed a happy smile.

「……food. My.. my bread. The bread that belongs only to me.」

The death of her family, the fear of death that is approaching.

These sort of things do not matter.

Occupying the entire mind of the girl, is only one thing.

The only desire that conquered all these.

That is「hunger」instinct of the animals——the desire called「appetite」.

From the day the little girl was born, she has never eaten until she is「full」.

Unable to hope that this barren land will be able to produce enough crops, and there are also heavy taxes. The males were conscripted into the army, this village is only composed of the old, weak and disabled.

The little available food, are reserved for people who are able to work.

Like those who go out and hunt, those who farms, and those who parents.

The little girl is skinny and lacks strength, and hence unable to properly do these tasks.

Only those who work get to eat, the little girl could only have the food which is no better than nothing.

The little amount of food causes the lack of physical strength, and hence become unable to work properly, and this further results in the reduction of food as a punishment. This sort of vicious cycle continues until the very end.

The girl has once became so hungry until she almost became crazy, and shoved weeds into her mouth. Surviving in such a situation, is perhaps a sort of miracle. The other villages have the tragedies of killing their children to reduce the number of people. The girl who is at the death gates, barely survived.

——Even if the ravagers came into the hut, the little girl remained motionless：Even if the intruder revealed a nasty smile, the girl did not turn her head；Even if the burly soldiers reached out to push her down, the little girl did not resist.

She has no strength to escape. In this case, only the bread cannot be snatched away.

She desperately gathered her strength in her hands.

「What is wrong with this lass? What are you carefully holding? Hey, show it to me!」

「——!」

「Do not resist! If not I will kill you!」

「……Ah!」

The man gave a punch, and the little girl is brutally knocked onto the ground.

「What, this is only a normal bread crumb, I thought it was something of worth. Ah, anyway there was nothing to expect from the start. Okay, take off your clothes, I don’t have much time.」

The man grabbed the little girl’s bread and tossed it into his own mouth,and then roughly torn away the girl’s shabby clothes. The girl’s naked petite little body is exposed.

「The others are all old women, the only young one is you. Though you are skinny, but I will just have to endure it.」

The man took off his clothes, and pushed her down before pressing on her, thinking to kill her after completing his matters.

「……」

The girl completely did not care about her future. She could not stand continuing to endure her hunger.

But, she wants to kill this bastard guy. This guy stole her last amount of food. With killing intent filling her heart, her pulsing hatred gradually began to seep out.

Together with the dark emotion that is overflowing, is the hunger that almost turned her crazy. Anything is fine. As long as it is something that can be eaten, she will want

to put it in her mouth.

Is there anything that can be eaten? The girl searched with her bloodshot eyes. Concentrating her sights, while twisting the corners of her lips, she continues to search for「something」that can be eaten.

Then—— she found it. She has discovered a prey that is more delicious than bread.

The odd action of the girl, caused the soldier who pushed her down to reveal a puzzled expression. When he is about to rip off the underwear, his sights met with the girl's sight.

The guy could not help but cringe back.

An experienced mercenary, who has to date killed many people, was shocked by a mere little lass. He did not care whether the prey cries or screams, but yet he has never seen anyone who reveals a smile when they met with such a situation.

It does not seem like madness due to despair. The girl is only smiling happily.

「Wh.. what is it? What are you laughing about?」

「……」

The Shinigami who is holding a scythe looked at the girl. The girl did not feel any fear.

Is this an illusion? Or is this the real Shinigami who is waiting to reap my soul?

Dressed in a black robe, a Shinigami who wore a skull mask. The embarrassed guy looks like he is overlapping with the Shinigami.

Her vision seems to have a problem. The girl, in the gradually blurring world, only focused her gaze at somewhere.

「Wha.. What exactly are you looking at?」

「……Delicious.」

「Wh..what?」

「You look… Delicious.」

As the girl looked at the man who is possessed by the Shinigami, a certain thought came to her mind.
Like a wild beast who found its prey, twisting the corners of its mouth happily from the bottom of its heart, and revealing its teeth. Her thought was——

「This fellow's neck, look so soft so delicious.」

Before the Shinigami's scythe swung down, the girl has already leaped towards the man, biting his throat.

The girl grimaces as she spat out the human flesh, solidly biting on the Shinigami.

Suppressing the body of the struggling Shinigami, her teeth repeatedly sunk into the

Shinigami’s throat.

The live sacrifice’s unexpected counterattack, caused the Shinigami’s scythe to drop and lose his balance.
Even so, the girl continues to bite the Shinigami relentlessly.

The male mercenary has already died when his carotid artery was bitten, but the battle between the girl and the Shinigami continues.

Finally, the Shinigami cloaked in black fell, exhausted. Taking a look after removing the skull mask, there is nothing underneath it.

The Shinigami who harvests the ambition and desire of the dead, has lost to the girl who is driven by her appetite.

——The girl’s name is Shera.

Born in a poor village, a girl with an appetite that slightly bigger than an average person.

Chapter 1: Bread is Delicious

It was a common tale in the beginning.
A poor village swallowed up by the ravages of war, its fortune, food, and lives snatched away. Invaders mercilessly trampled the villagers' location, which had a series of crop failures and was struggling with starvation. Unable to even resist, their miserable lives were reaped by swords, or possibly spears.

All throughout the village rose shrieks and screams, and then they were extinguished. Sating their greed and to make sport, they set fire to the buildings after looting them, and they left not a single vestige behind. The invaders took careful aim at a father and child who, seeing an opening, had decided to escape, and they collapsed face down.

From this Cauldron of Hell, not even a single person could escape.

It was inside that boiling, abominable hell fire.
A single, emaciated, scrawny young girl with lifeless eyes had secluded herself in a run-down hut. She had no energy nor strength to move remaining. The young girl's family tried to run, but they were slaughtered on the way.

The girl who could not sufficiently do farmwork was thought a burden by not just the villagers, but also her family. If she died for them, they would be happier instead, they considered.
Therefore, she was the only one in the family left behind and consequently survived until now, since no one could escape the encircled village.
Inside the girl's heart were resignation, despair, grief, and sorrow. Various emotions were mixed together.

However, more than those emotions, there was but one thought stronger than them in her. Only one desire outweighed them.
It was a sad, wretched desire that could be called a human instinct as well, "Hunger."

Since this person was born, she never had a full stomach. An ample harvest could not be expected from the infertile earth, and furthermore, there was a harsh tax imposed. The meager remaining food was preferentially given to the laborers. The ones who went out hunting. The ones who performed farm work. The ones who raised children. The young girl who could not do a single thing sufficiently was given nothing but scraps of food.
Even so, it could still be called happiness that she was just able to live.
Since there were cases of other villages resorting to murder to reduce the number of mouths to feed.

—Hence, when an invader finally came in, the girl did not even quiver. Even when the invader revealed a broad and detestable smile, the girl did not avert her face away. Even when the well-built soldier pushed her down and his arms came reaching for her, she did not shake him off.

Even when Death holding its large scythe looked down upon her, she did not feel dread. Was it just an illusion, or was it the real Death, had it come to harvest her soul?

Death, wearing a tattered robe and a white mask. However, the feeling of hunger was not sated by the appearance of the dreadful god of death.
Death and the man pushing her down could be seen overlapping each other. Her vision was becoming increasingly abnormal it seemed.
In the world which began to be infected with vice, the girl muttered that she was hungry many times over in her mind.
The girl's crude clothes were violently torn off. She no longer cared what would happen afterwards; her stomach was empty. 'Isn't there anything to eat,' she hummed and looked around.
At her out of place behavior, the soldier who pushed her down displayed a puzzled face. When his gaze met the girl's, the man involuntarily drew back.The skilled soldier who had killed many people was stupefied.

"Y-you, what the heck–"

"……ous."

"W-wha?"

"You, look so delicious."

She fixed her gaze on the man possessed by Death, and a single thought surfaced in the girl's inner mind… She distorted her lips into a delighted smile, baring her teeth. What she thought was,

"This person's tender throat, looks so very delicious."

Two countries, the Yuze Kingdom and the Keyland Empire, were struggling for supremacy of the Mundo Novo continent. It was apparent that the situation was critical.
The impetus was last year's large crop failure. The Yuze Empire which held most of the land that experienced poor harvests resorted to relying on imports of food supplies from other countries.
Whereupon, their trading partner, the Dolebacks Union suddenly imposed an embargo. In concert, the Keyland Empire unilaterally decreed that their Non-Aggression Pact was revoked.
Originally, it was an alliance proposed by an independent region from the Yuze Kingdom. Currently, there was a tentative cease-fire, but small skirmishes with the Empire repetitively occurred along the borders. The Kingdom's decline was to their advantage for sure, with no disadvantages. Aiming for an internal collapse, they cooperatively applied pressure, increasingly cutting off the Kingdom's life.
Due to this embargo, the Kingdom's finances were dire. They became forced to levy heavy taxes on the people, and many starved to death in the Kingdom's territory.

The Empire further reached out their hands, and were successful in converting Princess Altura, an orphaned child of the current Kingdom's prince.
She was backed with funds and an army, and "The Royal Capital Liberation Army" was established.
As the brains behind the operation, they sent in young, male soldiers of the Empire and appointed the Empire's 2nd Prince as second in command. It goes without saying that he would marry the princess in the future, contriving to take over the Kingdom.

Even the Liberation Army desperately wanted a backer, and there was no reason to refuse their aid. They knew the dangers of being a puppet beforehand. For the utterly tyrannized people torn apart by the succession struggle, the current Kingdom was a more irreconcilable enemy than the Empire.

The plan was for the Liberation Army to consist of 30,000 soldiers, but there were not actually that many.
The Kingdom could have crushed them whenever at first, but they were overlooked as the Kingdom poured their strength into small skirmishes with the Empire.
However, the Liberation army occupied the stronghold "Salvador Fortress," continued to steadily increase their region of control, and invited those suffering from the Kingdom's tyranny.
Their numbers increased day by day, and they eventually could not be overlooked.
If allowed to multiply as they were currently, they would become an extremely threatening existence, the top brass of the Kingdom judged.
The Kingdom finally moved their heavy asses and decided to mobilize, further squeezing out the assets from the already hard-pressed citizens.

Antigua Branch Castle, the forefront of the Yuzu Kingdom.
Situated in the south part of the Central Border Zone, it was an important base which effectively glared over the border with the Empire. North of there was Salvador Fortress, the Liberation Army's stronghold. Large amounts of money were pumped into strengthening Antigua's walls; these were tenacious walls which had repulsed the Empire's attacks on countless occasions so far.
Half of the newly enlisted soldiers, appropriately called small fry, were dispatched here.
Then, would they die in small skirmishes? Would they be executed for desertion? Or would they survive and earn a paltry sum of money? Which of these fates awaited them?
Naturally of course, there were curious people who desired to be enlisted, but a great majority of the soldiers were youths who were forcibly conscripted.

Mixed among these new soldiers with bad expressions was a girl who was happily stuffing her cheeks with bread and dried meat; she would be classified as one of those curious people.

"You, as always, you're enjoying yourself eating. It isn't that delicious, that thing."

"It is because I can eat a lot of it, since everyone does not feel like eating much."

"When your stomach is bulging, good and bad is another issue. Jeez, what a weirdo."

The Platoon Leader in charge of the new recruits muttered in astonishment, but the girl finished her drink in one chug without showing any signs of caring.

"Schera's tastes are quite heedless aren't they? It is a common sight. More importantly, Platoon Leader, is the aforementioned rumor true?"

The platoon soldier who hadn't experienced his first battle worriedly inquired.

"……What rumor?"

The Platoon Leader asked back with a stern expression on his face.

“The one about commencing more and more offenses against the rebel army. It seems higher-ups have also arrived in groups.”

The “higher-ups” the young soldier mentioned — they were the admirals or perhaps generals who had a heap of medals affixed to their chests and boasted elite guards, staff officers, and soldiers marching along with them.
They were reinforcements from Eastern Berta. Including the Antigua reserve, their numbers would swell to roughly 100,000. It was the first large scale mobilization in a while.
Their numbers were plenty, their equipment so-so, and their experience was needless to say, low. The so called mish-mash comprised half of the army.

“……Ahh. There should be orders before long. We should prepare for them and make an effort to train. Whether you live or die is the fruit of your habitual training, and your luck.”

“Uwaa. So it was true. I still don’t want to die yet though……”

“Thank you for the meal.”

The young girl known as Schera put both hands together appearing satisfied. Seeing that, the young man unintentionally threw out a complaint.

“C’mon man. Don’t just think about eating, think a bit about what we said just now. Your life tomorrow is more important than today’s bread and meat right!”

“For me, today’s bread and meat are more essential. They are greatly valuable, more than going along with your complaining.”

“You quibbling shit girl!”

“Shit girl, no thank you.”

“Hey, conscripts, leave it at that. C’mon, if you’re done eating, hurry up and return to training!”

The two saluted when the Platoon Leader roared out, and they hurriedly returned to the parade ground.

The youth was quite the normal young man. If his luck was good, he would live, and if it was bad, he would probably die. Not even leaving his name in history, he was just a common soldier, consumable goods.

But of course, he himself understood that. With just common luck, he would have the bragging right called living.
The Platoon Leader smoked a cigarette. The smoke clouded his eyes.
However, that girl. Even though she was still a young girl, the girl at an appropriate age to be a soldier was not very understood. She was a odd human who personally went to enlist in the army.
Her age was around 16. Her birthplace was an agricultural village captured by the rebel army. Her reason for volunteering was a joke, “to eat until full.” There was but one reason why this girl who seemed unable to decently handle a sword was eligible.

Because she presented the heads of ten rebel soldiers while covered in blood. Their heads and proof of affiliation were disorderly thrown into a large, leather bag. She even was courteous enough to bring back a flag of the self-proclaimed Liberation Army.

Normally, there should have been a large amount of suspicions, but there was one thing the great Kingdom prided itself on. That there would be no problems if one possessed the power to kill the enemy, and she was immediately approved for enlistment.
At that occasion, while small, a cash reward was conferred as a reward for defeating the enemy.
And then, what fate was it that arranged for her to be assigned to the troop under his control.
The man who commanded the platoon, hearing the whole story, could only sigh.

"Jeez. I don't get anything. I have a bad friggen' premonition."

Looking at the young girl at training, performing practice swings with her large scythe, the man involuntarily let out a sigh.
In spite of it being utterly preposterous, she readily displayed her skill with handling her scythe that she obtained from somewhere, even though he allowed her to use a sword.
At the time when she first participated in training, "Don't wield something beyond your ability," he said and decided to take it, but he dropped the large scythe on the ground due to its excessive weight. That ridiculous scythe took two new recruits to finally lift it up (It was impossible to swing it or anything).
Though it was a conundrum how a young girl with a seedy build could handle it, she certainly seemed to have more war potential when handling it than handling a sword.
It would be appropriate to say that the girl had absolutely no hope in swordsmanship.
He inevitably recognized her as a special case, but either way, a scythe was half-baked as a weapon. It could not outrange a spear, and it fell behind a sword in cutting. Its outward appearance was imposing, but as a weapon that was it.
The reason why a scythe like that was not seen in actual combat was simple. It was not geared towards killing humans.

However, when he saw the young girl swinging the scythe with a happy expression and the blade biting into the dummies made of straw, he was reminded of something, though it was unpleasant. It was an existence everyone feared and should avoid.
Clad in black clothes, an aberration which hunted the souls of people. A sinister symbol which appeared at the verge of death.

——Death.

"Hey, Schera. Are you really going to fight with that scythe? It's a pain in butt, and unwieldy, nothing good about it. Even if you have some outrageous strength."

The youth from before raised his voice worriedly. He had a bad mouth, but as it was, he was a good person.

"A normal sword just doesn't match me, so I cannot help it. This one, has grown accustomed to me. I wonder why."

Schera raised the scythe up with one hand, and the curved blade sent the dummy's

head flying.
Schera's black hair with a tinge of brown swayed left and right with that force. Not long, but neither short, her hair extended to her shoulders. With a feeling of gloominess, she made a brushing gesture with her left hand.
The youth nearby seeing that, shook his head side to side while making a shocked expression.

"Good grief. Where did you get your hands on such a thing? Don't tell me, is it custom made?"

"I found it."

"That's a lie! Like such a dangerous thing would just be carelessly dropped!"

"Do you want to know no matter what?"

"If you're telling, I'll listen for now. Since we're talking about it."

"……Truth is,"

Schera's voice quickly dropped to a lower volume as she smiled bewitchingly. It was different from her usual curtness.
The young soldier reflexively swallowed his saliva seeing that expression.

"Truth is?"

"—-I, am a Death God."

The words were whispered near his ear. The youth, realizing he was being made fun of, yelled as his face flushed.

"You shit girl! Even when a person takes the trouble to seriously listen!"

"Since I told you, please treat me to some bread sometime. With cheese too, looking forward to it. It's a promise."

Schera extended out her hand, but it was strongly brushed away.

"Shaddap! You go eat grass or something!"

The youth perked up his shoulders and headed towards the location of another straw dummy. Once she was done looking at him, Schera resumed practice again.

"If it's grass, I've eaten that many times; it wasn't delicious. It's bitter and doesn't fill your stomach at all. Humans aren't cows or horses. …….The most delicious thing I've ever had was"

"—-Death from that time."

From above, the scythe brandished vertically above her head split the straw dummy in clean halves.

Yuze Kingdom Army, Third Army Corps Headquarters. As the night wore on, at the same time, a surprise attack was decided to be made according to the army corps commander General Yalder's suggestion. Marching during the night had high risk. There would also be an outbreak of deserters.

Though the ones launching the surprise attack were the Third Army Corps, they were elite and had high honors; it was a division of 10,000 people under the command of Major General Jira. Their strategy was to group up with the reservists assigned to Antigua Branch Castle and launch a scathing attack on the food storehouses located around the enemy stronghold.
If the operation succeeded according to plan, it was assured that fatal damage would be inflicted upon the Liberation Army.

Of course, the enemy's vigilance would be strict, but, "If it's our elite troops, we would surely destroy them," were Yalder's words. After which, by the majority vote from commissioned officers who were sitting in a line, the strategy was to be carried out.
—-It was also determined that the platoon Schera was attached to would have the honor of participating in the surprise attack.
Though for the people whom it concerned, it was probably a sorrowful event. If they fought, they would die. The ones to die would be the soldiers who were scraped up after all.

The surprise attack would have two phases.
The staff officers would, after the surprise attack succeeded, pursue the rebel army without exception, or so it was planned.
On the road of pursuit, half of the Third Army Corps which were holded up in the fort would lay in ambush, stationed in the woodlands.
Then, the scheme called for the pursuit unit to thoroughly encircle the arriving enemy and drive them to extinction.
If all went well this time, the insurgents calling themselves the Royal Capital Liberation Army would be driven to collapse in one blow.

"……Will it succeed? This night attack. I feel somewhat uneasy."

"Dunno. I wonder too. Except, I'm looking forward to the food silo. It's a thing filled with food. We'll be able to pick anything we want, no doubt about it."

Schera and the youth, who was wearing crude armor on his person, marched while whispering. The vicinity was completely enveloped in darkness. While this may be obvious, fire was forbidden as this was a surprise attack. In the woodlands which had fallen silent, the soldiers stifled their breaths and simply and earnestly marched forwards.

"……You know, I've been thinking since then. Is there only eating inside your head? You should think more about other things."

"Yeah, you didn't know?"

"Jesus, I envy how you're so happy-go-lucky. …… You know I, can't help but be scared. I keep on thinking how I won't be able to ever go home again. I still, still have a lot of things I want to do. I'm fearful of dying."

The youth clenched his fist tightly, as if suppressing his shivering.
Schera took out a fried bean from her small bag and tossed it into her mouth. A good taste filled her mouth. It seemed out of place.

"If you die, then you won't be scared. Isn't that a good thing? You won't need to worry so much anymore."

"……If you also die, then you won't feel hunger anymore, so good for you. A dead person doesn't feel hunger."

"I guess, that's true."

"Isn't it?"

"Hey, be quiet! The enemy will hear you!"

While they thought the Platoon Leader's voice was the loudest, after exchanging glances, the two fell silent.

—-Have we marched for an hour already? Or maybe it was two hours? Has the vanguard already launched the attack? Soon, we will, will we really be able to do a surprise attack without being discovered?
The youth asked himself while marching forward. While trying as best as he could to not make any sound.
He knew the answer to his previous question immediately. No, it should be said he was made to know.

"—-Retards of the Kingdom!! You will all die here-!!"
"Archers-, Start Volley! Annihilate them-!"

Together with a powerful command, torches glowed through the gaps of the surrounding trees. At the same time, fire arrows with sounds of cutting the wind struck the Kingdom's army.

"E-Enemy!! Rebel army ambush!!"

"Wh-What is this! Was the surprise attack seen through-!? Hurry, retreat, Retreat-! Withdraw-!!"

Jira who lead the surprise attack unit raised his angry voice and gave out orders. To take advantage of an enemy's carelessness, and then herd and rout them in one fell swoop was called, "A Surprise Attack." That being said, the ones being ambushed were reversed. Their situation was that of prey who were successfully lured out. The commander had to immediately reorganize the formation or else—-.

"The fire is spreading too quickly! S-Sir, oil was scattered! F-Fire is coming all throughout the forest!"

“Hurry and open an escape path! We’ll be annihilated like this-!”

The entire surprise attack plan had been leaked to the rebel army, and a large quantity of hay and oil were strewn ahead of the path they would march in the woodlands beforehand. A large amount of fire arrows had rained down there.
There was no longer any way of reforming Jira’s division that had fallen into disarray.
Would they be burnt to death in the forest, or would they go out and be skewered by the enemy.
Commander Major General Jira continued to berate his soldiers to escape somehow, but finally, he was killed by the rebel army leader.
There was not a trace of that overflowing confidence which filled his expression habitually on his face; there was only one that seemed to scream, “I don’t want to die.”

Schera’s platoon which followed them was also swallowed up by the vortex of flames.
The arrows did not cease and continued to rain without any gaps. Platoon soldiers were also killed in action in the furious melee.
The soldiers who were killed in action were Schera’s acquaintances, and there was a time when she was treated to bread by them. She took out a small scrap of bread that she had put in her pocket, threw it into her mouth, and chewed.
That she would no longer be given treats, was very unfortunate.

“Even if we stay here like this, we’ll only be burnt to death. Sink or swim, we can only exit the forest. Prepare yourselves.”

The Platoon Leader strained his voice and informed the soldiers.

“B-But Platoon Leader. Won’t we be completely surrounded outside too?”

“That time comes, we resign ourselves to our bad luck. If you don’t want to, it’s fine if you stay here. I don’t mind if you violate military regulations. However, that you will be burnt to death, I guarantee it. …… Those who have the guts, unsheathe your swords. We’ll attack all at once on my signal.”

The Platoon Leader and the soldiers in the prime of their lives took out their weapons and looked to the right. Through a break in the trees, an open field could be seen, and no enemy soldiers were found. Of course, there was a good likelihood that enemy soldiers were lying down.
From the front arose black smoke, screams, and flames, compelling every soldier to make their decision.

Another platoon from the rear raised a strange voice and sprung out into the plains.
At the same time, the Platoon Leader also gave out his orders.

“Start the attack-!! Charge!!”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

“Forwards forwards! Don’t look beh—-”

“—-Fire-!”

At the platoon’s bold dash, arrows came flying level to the field. The Liberation Army’s soldiers were eagerly, restlessly awaiting them. There were no soldiers who were

performing the ambush that had revealed themselves to their enemy. Camouflaged, arrows nocked, spears gripped, they had concealed their sharp killing intent.
It was already too late for the other platoon that used to be behind them. Dead bodies pierced by arrows were scattered everywhere.
An arrow pierced the brow of the Platoon Leader who went first. His body as well; several shafts were stuck in his armor, and the Platoon Leader died in action without being able to raise a scream or be surprised.

The youth, whether fortunate or unfortunate, only had been struck in his shoulder and right knee, and he bore no fatal wounds. However, that did not change his fate. The difference was only now, or later. The enemy soldiers changed to spears from bows and were impatiently closing the distance. The wounded platoon members in the vicinity were also already in no condition to fight.
No reinforcements, and the platoon behind them was already walking the road to Hades.

"U-Uaa-!"

With his posture destroyed, there was no meaning in pointing a sword towards the enemy. He entertained the thought of throwing away his sword and surrendering, but he quickly threw it away. They wouldn't take one common soldier as a prisoner after all.
—-I will die here.
The youth did not want to die from the bottom of his heart.

"Platoon Leader, he died huh. Even though he treated me to many meals. Truly unfortunate."

"—-Eh?"

He thought he had heard Schera's usual and unchanging voice next to his ear, in that moment, something charged into the enemy soldiers. It was too quick, and the youth could only do his best and follow it with his eyes.
Then, at the same time blood danced from within the torches, screams roared.

"U-Ugyaaaaaaaaaaaaaa-!!"

"Whew."

"—-Wh-Wh-!"

An enemy soldier's right arm was lopped off by a large scythe, and the head of a man who stood next to him dumbfounded was sent flying.
The blade of the scythe was keen, and the heads of the Liberation Army's soldiers were decapitated and soared — it was just like mowing weeds.
The man who had his right arm severed had no idea of the circumstances which had befallen him, and he fell face down.
His bleeding was severe, and he probably wouldn't be able to avoid death.

"Oi, what are you guys doing! The opponent is just a single person! Surround and ki —-"

Into the face of the man who gave orders like a commanding officer stabbed the tempered edge of the scythe's point. Those at the sides fell silent as the person's face

was torn into irregular shapes. It seemed he had unknowingly gotten in range of the scythe.

"Hi-Hiiiiiii-!!"

The soldiers' screams resonated. Anyone would upon seeing a disaster befall a human who was just living.

"Kind of annoying when there's many people. But, I won't leave anyone alive. I will massacre all of you rebel army."

While whispering a monologue, it aloofly intersected a spear that was thrusted. At that opening, the edge of the scythe pierced deeply from overhead the opponent. And like that, the vicinity became a sea of blood, and the meaningless corpse was thrown away.

The Liberation Army's troops that had fallen into a state of panic fired arrows while trembling. Schera spun her scythe and brushed them off like it was nothing.
It was as though a conqueror or hero had come from the legends, the youth thought.

One, and then another enemy soldier began to retreat.
Having lost their drive, the troops crumbled like being hit by an avalanche.
The instant Schera made a slight smile and stepped forward with her right foot:

"—-H-Help! T-This guy's a Death God!!"
"M-Monster!! We can't winn!"
"I don't want to die in a place like thiss!!"

The several people who lived raised screams and started running away.
Schera decided one man as her target from amongst them and heaved the scythe in her hand with vigorous force.
The scythe stuck into a large tree ahead of her and cut the body of the soldier in its path in two, which started spasming and twitching as its entrails leaked out. It was instant death.

While the youth and the surviving platoon soldiers were dumbfounded, Schera in a trot went to pick up her large scythe. She postured the scythe on her shoulder, and her figure was one of utter, sincere happiness against a backdrop of fire.
Her face was smeared with blood; her armor as well. Pieces of meat and viscera stuck to her scythe. It was a terrible spectacle that one couldn't look straight at.

"……"

"Hi, Hii-!"

"……What's the matter? Your face is pale you know?"

From the middle of the plains which was filled with the dense smell of blood, Death itself headed towards the youth. It was Schera's silhouette projected by the flickering illumination.
As if clad in black, tattered robes, the monster of death was imprinted onto the youth's vision. The sinister scythe slowly swayed side to side. As if it was hunting its next prey.

That, was as long as the youth could maintain his consciousness.

Chapter 2: Cheese is Very Delicious

Chapter Two: Cheese is Very Delicious

The youth finally opened his eyes at the sharp pain running through his shoulder. The surroundings were oversaturated with the rising groans of patients. The more his consciousness cleared, the more his breathing became disheveled. His vision swayed. Taking a deep breath, he prepared himself and looked at his own body timidly. What limbs am I missing—-that was his only worry. If he paid attention, he had no arms or legs–was the tragedy that was all too close to him everyday.

The happy news was that his limbs were intact, and he was not missing a single extremity. He had been laid on a shabby bed, and his shoulder and knee which were injured by arrows had been dressed in bandages. The youth needed a moment before feeling relieved that he was somehow saved.

When he covered his face with both hands and ruminated on the fact that he was still living, his main benefactor, whom he deep down dreaded to meet, came along, holding a tray with a pitcher of water and two plain pieces of bread on it.

“Morning. Hungry?”

“……He-Here is?”

“Branch Castle Antigua. Our home. So, hungry?”

“……No, just gimme the water. I don’t want to eat anything right now.”

The youth lightly waved his hands to refuse, and Schera pointed to the bread and asked,

“Then, you don’t need this bread?”

“Ahh, you can eat it. I don’t have an appetite.”

“Much thanks. It’ll be tough if you don’t eat in the times that you can. I won’t give it back even if you tell me to. Never.”

She passed the youth a glass of water and gnawed at the bread that did not look very delicious. She made a smile of supreme bliss, and slowly chewed the dry, hard bread. This person is actually happy, the youth thought.

“……Hey, after that, what happened to our platoon?”

“Half of Jira’s division was annihilated. The soldiers that somehow escaped were worn-out. The surviving members of our platoon were you, me, and maybe three other people? Unfortunately, Platoon Leader was not carried here.”

“……Platoon Leader, so he passed away.”

“He can’t treat me ever again. Truly unfortunate.”

"……"

The glory of Jira's division was that the commander died in battle and that a great majority were annihilated.
General Yalder and The Third Army Corps members that were hiding as the ambushers, upon receiving news of defeat, were greatly disconcerted, made a commotion, retraced their steps to the back to the fortress with hasty speed, and tightly closed the gates.
The other party, the Royal Capital Liberation Army, wrapped up the rest of the defeated army, and their morale momentously started increasing.
The young man Commissioned Officer Fynn Kattef who killed Jira was greatly extolled as a Hero.
The Empire, which had hitherto been waiting and watching, sped up their military expansion and began to harbor aspirations of crossing the Alucia River, the national border. They began to assemble military forces in the Northwest as well.
At the moment, the two were glaring at each other, and tensions were minimized, but if the Empire declared war, the outbreak of war might involve the whole continent.
Presently, it was the Kingdom's civil war, and it wasn't a war that involved fellow nations yet.
However, everyone could see that it was only a matter of time.

"Until new personnel are attached to our unit, I will be the acting Platoon Leader. My rank was that of a common soldier, so I have been promoted to Temporary Second Lieutenant. In other words, your superior officer. You'll be in my care from now on."

"Leave the jokes to your scythe. My wounds tingle."

"I wasn't lying. The enemy commander from that time seemed to be of some renown. Having brought back proof of his affiliation, I received words of praise. Along with tasty food subsequently."

Schera had repatriated, bringing back the head of the enemy commander in the midst of defeat–with an additional bonus of carrying back a teammate.
She had been extolled with words of praise from the Company Commander, and until a successor could be determined, she had been entrusted with commanding the platoon.
It wasn't a promotion per se; anyone would have been fine actually. Who took command of a mish-mash of reservists was not a matter of concern.

"……Really? It's the end of the world."

"With your injuries, it seems you won't be able to return to duty presently. You should go back to your hometown, and live a quiet life to the utmost. Plow the fields fervently, and send me some food please."

Soldiers with wounded shoulders, knees, etc. were not usable. They would be sent back to the country before long, and maybe they would be recruited again once they were healed.
After all, that was just what consumable goods were. Well, just being sent back could be said to be exceptional. The worst case would be being abandoned on the battlefield. The youth was innerly relieved. For the moment, he had been saved. He could say he was fortunate enough.

"……Fuu."

"Well then, take care of yourself. Once you leave here, we will probably not meet again."

Schera held the tray under her arm and pivoted on her heel to leave. The youth raised his voice in a panic. He had forgotten to say something important.

"Ah, wa-wait a bit."

"……What is it I wonder."

"T-Thanks for saving me. Really. If you weren't there, I would have died. So, thanks."

The youth lowered his head so he would not make eye contact. In that impulsive moment, he feared that Death's scythe would sink into his own neck. That wasn't a good thing to think about his companion who had saved him. However, he was scared.

"Treat me to a meal something. Of course, with cheese. That would be nice."

With a light wave of her hand, Schera left the field hospital crammed with casualties behind while chewing her bread.

—-Antigua Branch Castle, Headquarters
Shouting at the downcast staff officers was a single, middle-aged man with a flushed face.
He was the commanding officer of the Kingdom's Third Army, General Yalder. He had a short temper and largely lacked discretion, but as far as military offense went; he could boast that none in the Kingdom could match him.
His niche was his heavy infantry and heavy cavalry, nicknamed The Steel Division, and constantly repeated fierce assaults. They boasted stubborn defense like an iron wall. Yalder had poured his blood into raising them.
He piled up spectacular achievements for suppressing insurgents and thieves and skirmishing with the Empire. Thus, he acquired actual results along with pride.
It was to his disgrace that 10,000 soldiers had been wiped out, thoroughly caught in the enemy's ambush and that his confidant Jira had been killed in the end. He ground his teeth so hard that blood flowed from his lips, and his face was so flushed that it looked like a blood vessel would burst at any time.

"Fuckfuckfuck-!!Those rebels are making fun of me-!! The glory of the name Third Corps is sobbing at this rate!"

"Sir, please calm yourself. Certainly, we lost 10,000 officers and men, but our main body is still unhurt. It is vital that we harden our defense of this castle right now."

Chief Staff Officer Sidamo Arte calmly advised.
Born from a fallen aristocratic family, he rose in rank with just his wit. Naturally, it had been painstaking to set up a network of personal connections, and his pride had been trodden on countless times.
But perhaps as a result, he had splendidly made the position of Third Army Corps Staff Officer his own and even went so far as to earn Yalder's confidence.
He was 30 years old and still young, and even as only a support, there were good

indications that he would be further promoted.

He had first been opposed to Yalder's surprise attack idea, but he couldn't usurp a military officer's authority–he could do nothing but give a gentle warning. Since if Sidamo incurred the displeasure of a superior officer, he could kiss his position goodbye.

"You don't have to say that; I know already!! However, I was entrusted with 100,000 soldiers from His Majesty, like I could just hide here. I'll be made a laughingstock-!!"

Yalder raged while sending his spit flying.

"The Liberation Army—-No, the rebel army, has reconciled with and absorbed the soldiers from Jira's division who had surrendered. Furthermore, they are working on expanding their region of control."

Another Staff Officer reported on the Liberation Army's state of affairs.

"If we just twiddle our fingers like this, those friggen' rebels will only grow more impudent. Those fools, have they they forgotten their obligation to the Kingdom!!? I will eradicate everyone, even their families!!"

Yalder forcefully slapped his desk. The documents having been affected scattered, and the civil officials gathered them.

"There are currently no movements from the Empire's Army. However, there are often strange signal fires being sent up from observation posts……"

"Hmph, didn't that start a while ago? I don't believe those Empire scum would do something like seriously attack. They're focusing all their efforts on backing the rebel army from behind. They are desperate to protect their own assets, no mistake."

One military officer let out a sigh, and a civil official objected.

"However, they are increasing their military preparations. This is news from a spy undergoing military drills as we speak."

"Misinformation, or perhaps deceived by lies. How many times has this happened up until now!? Each time, we strengthen our defenses. Every time, it's been a fool's errand; I won't let you say that you've forgotten that!"

"Strengthening the defense of our national borders is commonplace. Calling it a fool's errand, is that not an exaggeration? What do you plan to do if perchance the Empire crosses the border and launches an attack!?"

"Hmpf. Even if the Empire mobilized all of their troops, they still would not even reach half of the Kingdom's soldiers. War is won by numbers. In other words, no matter what skirmishes we lose, at the very end, we, the Yuze Kingdom, will win. Don't you understand that, you civil official?"

At some statistic that was pulled out of somewhere, the civil officer let out an overbearing sigh.

"Won't even reach half our numbers? What kind of intelligence is that!? The Empire is

attempting to expand their military more than they have before!”

“And so what of it! Don’t you know how many weak soldiers there are!!?”

With that spark, the military officials and civil officials started arguing on their own accord. This was a frequent occurrence, and Sidamo could no longer stop it. Just intervening would be ridiculous.

“Your Excellency. This is our best chance, while the enemy is drunk on their victory. Our numbers overwhelmingly exceed theirs. There is no need for planning and such, let’s squash them with a frontal attack!”

When a single, brave division commander raised his voice, other military officers followed with words of agreement. ‘Haven’t they learned the hard way,’ Sidamo was amazed, but it wasn’t shown on his face. This was often the case with The Third Army Corps.

“Mph. You guys’ proposal is agreeable! Shall I show you all the fearsomeness of our Steel Division! Chief Staff Officer Sidamo, do you have any comments!?”

“Sir-! Salvador Fortress, where the rebel army is holed up, has been deteriorated by age and is unfit for defense. I fear that an ambush may come while we march on the Alucia Plains.”

Sidamo spread out a map on the desk and pointed to the plains.

“If so, let them come. Our heavy infantry will round up all of them!”

One military officer pushed the horse piece representing the Kingdom’s army straight to Salvador Fortress.

“Their small force is quite unlucky. If they stay in the castle, we crush them. If they are aware of their disadvantage and come out onto the plains, then it will absolutely be our victory. Isn’t our victory assured?”

Yalder humorously laughed, and guzzled down water from an extravagant vessel.

“No doubt about it, the enemy is formulating a plan. There is need for sufficient caution against fire. We must not fall prey to the same one that Major General Jira fell prey to.”

“If we engage on the plains, then isn’t there no need to worry about ambushes? Even if there is one, their numbers are few. We can crush them underfoot.”

“The enemy is reading our path of advance. With certainty, they have some kind of trap I believe.”

“Sir Chief Staff Officer, you worry too much. You’ll die early at this rate.”

At a division commander’s teasing, the military officers laughed.

“—-Your Excellency. This is not excessive caution. We ought to send out the scouts while taking maximum precaution.”

"I get it. I get it. Chief Staff Officer Sidamo's words also have reason. As you say, we will be sufficiently vigilant, and then entirely crush the opposition. Is that enough?"

"Sir- I am grateful for having my humble opinion taken into consideration!"

When Sidamo respectfully bowed his head, Yalder nodded in approval many times.

"Right. The Third Army's course of action has been determined. We will decapitate the heads of the rebels hags, and with our hands clear the name of Jira! We will attack with 80,000, and 10,000 will be left to defend this castle. We depart to the front the day after tomorrow! Everyone have your preparations in order!!"

"Sir-!"

The military officers saluted and left the military main office.
Sidamo brooded for a short while, but with a light wave of his head, he followed after them.

—-Antigua Branch Castle, Campgrounds.
A 100,000 strong army was scraped up from the neighboring area, and Schera's company was driven out from the barracks that was originally theirs to use. They were forced into huddling in a shabby tent and resting around a fire.

"Man. Thanks to those military cadet guys from the Royal Capital, my body's freezing from this coldness. Ahh, it's so cold. I'm actually going to freeze to death."

"If the military police hear that kind of grumbling, they'd gratefully start preaching to you. Don't get me involved bro."

"I swear that the day I get preached to is the day I die. Don't abandon me."

"Shaddup. Get away from me. I don't swing that way."

"Jeez. The amount of food has also decreased. I can't do anything like this. Also, our new Platoon Leader is a little touched. What are the higher ups thinking…"

"Haha. If she just had a bit more meat to her, wouldn't that be nice. Even though she eats so much, just where the heck does it all go? Personally, I'd want her breasts to be a bit fuller."

"I'm an ass-man myself. Unfortunately, our Platoon Leader's got nothing anywhere."

The devastated platoons were merged into one amalgamated platoon. This was the platoon that Schera came to lead. However, it was a small one of just 10 men.

"……We, were saved by Schera——, no, by Platoon Leader Schera. Her outward appearance is like that, but her strength is for real. She annihilated the enemy soldiers alone. You guys too, should know that."

"I hear ya. I've heard that so many times already. Well, as a platoon under such a

great leader, we might be able to live long lives."

"It's promising… I don't really care for having to die. Shall we just humbly hope we'll become heroes, not attack, and watch the show?"

"Hahaha. Cheers, to Sir Platoon Leader Schera, our Hero!"

"Cheers!"

The soldiers started drinking alcohol while revealing large smiles.
The members who were originally colleagues of Schera shivered as they tightly held their bowls of soup.

"……."

"……What's the matter?"

"N-No. Nothing. It's nothing."

"Weirdo. Your soup finally cooled down. Hurry up and finish it. After this is happy time drinking alcohol."

Schera was the one who got him out of trouble. If she wasn't there, he would have died there.
Therefore, though he thought of her like Death itself, he wouldn't say so.
Even though the figure of Death could be clearly seen, he wouldn't say so. If he did, it might be his turn next. Therefore, he wouldn't say so. He would attract the eyes of Death.

When he finished his soup that was as thin as water, he decided to join the soldiers in basking in the warmth of the bonfire, and he stretched out both hands.

Around that time, Schera was elegantly walking in the cold weather with the proof of Second Lieutenant rank triumphantly attached to her self.
Although she was greatly dissatisfied at the fact that the amount of food had decreased recently, success, she was gifted bread with cheese from a colleague she saved. While walking on the ramparts and gazing at the stars, she was enjoying her luxurious dinner.

"……Suspicious shadows detected. Quite free anyhow, shall I go check them out I wonder. I might be able to receive some delicious food. Once in awhile, I want to eat fruit. It's only been dried stuff recently."

Said Schera who licked her lips.

In her line of sight was a group looking around restlessly while walking as if trying not to make their footsteps heard.
Over their shoulders hung a large bag, it was as if they were doing a “Moonlight Flit.”
She could see that there were about ten or so people, but she couldn’t tell in detail.

She lightly flipped her Second Lieutenant proof-of-rank with her fingers, and Schera descended down the stairs and walked towards the group stealthily working.
When the moonlight shined on her scythe, its warped blade cruelly glinted as if having found prey.

Chapter 3: Roasted Beans are Fairly Delicious

Chapter Three: Roasted Beans are Fairly Delicious

Antigua Branch Castle, Back Gate.
A single soldier ascertaining the state of the vicinity beckoned with his hand and called his comrade.
The guard who should have been the gatekeeper at this time sent a signal with a light shake of his head and took out a key.
It was not the key to the stiff, shut castle gates. It was for the small but sturdy iron gate built nearby.
It was a small door that was forbidden to be opened unless in dire circumstances. The guard burdened with the duty of guarding this very gate opened it for the soldiers who decided to escape.

This gatekeeper had colluded with the Liberation Army, and was appointed with the covert duty of lowering morale and offering his kind services to deserters. This was a scene that had repeated itself many times already. The guard system inside the castle was quite slack, and this evening as well, there was nothing happening and should have ended as usual with him seeing off the deserting soldiers.

"……So you do not get found by the lookouts, in a moment, stoop and go forward. In a dilapidated house deep in the north forest is a contact on standby. Here's a map up until there. Once it is not needed, make sure to destroy and dispose of it."

When the gatekeeper handed them a map, a man received it and took a glance.

"……Sorry. You've saved us."

"Also, give these documents to the guy on standby."

The colluder took out an envelope with the documents inside.

"Yeah. I understand."

"The surveillance is weak, but be cautious enough——"

"You over there, what's going on?"

"———!"

In the middle of handing over the documents, a voice unsuited to the occasion spoke to the men. Though they felt like their hearts would stop, the gatekeeper and the deserters turned in that direction.

"If I'm correct, you guys were from the Eleventh Infantry Platoon I believe. Where are you heading out to, carrying that kind of luggage? Are you guys also going on a stroll

to gaze at the stars, I wonder?”

“You are…… the Thirteenth Infantry Platoon’s–”

“——Oi, wait. This person is okay.”

The still very young man who was in a posture as if ready to draw his sword at any moment, seeing Schera’s figure, let out a large sigh of relief. He was relieved since she would let them go.

The gatekeeper did not relax his vigilant gaze. If she let out a loud voice, he planned to kill her. Everything would be over if she made a racket.

“Temporary Second Lieutenant Schera.”

“Ahhh, the kid who had an annoying job pushed onto her. Isn’t the ‘Temporary’ just so tear-jerking?”

“It’s become a topic in other platoons as well. How long does she have to live, they say. She’s also become a target of some bets.”

“——More importantly, what’s going on?”

Asked Schera, smiling while putting her large scythe on her shoulder.

“Isn’t it obvious? We’re running away from this shitty army. Everyone wants to be on the winning side, right? Rumor has it that the Empire will be joining soon. At this rate, we’d die a dog’s death.”

“We will join the Royal Capital Liberation Army. I heard that one can earn a lot of money. Sorry, but I have no intent of dying for the Kingdom.”

“All the group members have agreed. We have appropriate weapons as gifts as well as food. We probably won’t be treated badly.”

The man who seemed to be the leader with his hand patted the bag on his back with a ‘Pomf.’ Schera, who had heard their response, nodded several times having understood the situation.

“I see. Well then, this is where we say farewell.”

“……You wanna come to? You’ll just die somewhere at this rate.”

“H-Hey.”

One of the deserters spontaneously retorted. He was worried that their extraneous burdens would increase.

“We can’t just leave her like this… She’s an eye-witness to our crime. Hey, you don’t mind if we bring one more person right?”

The gatekeeper frowned when the Platoon Leader asked, but as there was no recourse, he nodded his head.

“It’s not in the plan, but there’s no recourse. Killing women and children is unsettling

as one would expect. However, just you. You may not call any other of your group members.”

“So he says. You’re coming of course? We as small fry have absolutely no obligation to an army like this.”

“……I guess. Then I’ll be coming along. Mostly likely it’ll be a short while, but take care of me.”

With a bright, sweet smile, Schera expressed her consent. The men nodded in assent, and they escaped quietly out the side door.

—-Desertion was a serious crime. If exposed to the military, arguing would be useless: capital punishment.

The deserters stifled their breathing and hurried to the Woodlands while pressing their bodies into the grass. There was nothing more difficult than moving with unwieldy baggage, but they couldn’t go on empty-handed.
Schera had her large scythe as well, and she was no different from the men.

“Hey, Ms. Temporary Second Lieutenant Schera, how about throwing away that, that outlandish, gargantuan scythe? Isn’t it a constant pain in the butt?”

“Without this, I cannot fight.”

Schera gently brushed the handle of her scythe. The man, while shocked, whispered,

“Jeez. Fine. I’ll let you carry that scythe. Since you wanted to. You don’t look the part though. Once we reach the Liberation Army, hurry up and go back to your village. I won’t think any less of you.”

“I’ll keep that in consideration.”

“Platoon Leader! Isn’t that it over there?”

One of the group members reported while opening the map to confirm their current position. There was a large tree with an X gashed into it to serve as a landmark. Though it was dark and they couldn’t see well, thirty strides away from them, there was certainly a single, large tree standing out amidst the many smaller trees.

The deserting soldiers started silently walking, aiming at their landmark tree while trying not make any noise.
They had gradually reached the point further than the surveillance of the Kingdom’s soldiers. But, they did not relax their guard even until the end. This was the sole thing they had learned from the armed forces; it was the key to survival.

“—-Certainly, this incision seems like it was made by a human. So we turn left here?”

“Yes. Most likely this way I think. There’s some kind of animal trail.”

“Only around here are there some random footprints left behind. It seems like we’ll arrive if we follow these.”

“Despite the enemy conducting their operations so close, they didn’t notice at all. How comfortable. Are the heads of our leaders hollow?”

Muttered the Platoon Leader while stroking the large tree with his hand. All the group members spoke up in agreement.

“I can guess why our surprise attack was found out, heh.”

“Our decision to escape was spot on. To have been able to choose the correct choice at the last moment, we are blessed men. If I make it home, I’ll pray to the Stars. This is God’s favor to us devouts.”

“Praise the Star God.”

“Hear.”

These men had left behind families. They did not want to die in vain, to die a dog’s death. Even though they would be called traitors, survival was everything. This compulsive thought was shared by everyone.

Schera was happily gazing at the scene from a place slightly distant from them–all while fiddling with her beloved scythe perched on her shoulders. Incidentally, her stomach was empty, and she tossed into her mouth the preserved roasted beans that she had been carrying with her. The beans this time were just a little salty. It was not good, but it seemed like it was also not bad.

“Alright. Our break is over. Let’s tear up the map and bury it. A promise is a promise. Leave no traces behind.”

“Understood!”

“Hey, Schera. Don’t just be eating those bean things, help us out a bit.”

One member of the group complained to Schera, who was leisurely chewing her beans. Instead of a response, she struck out with the point of the large scythe and made a small hole.

“So that scythe is a substitute for a hoe? If you get home, make sure to help your parents out. As long as they live, give them the proper respect.”

He said with a touch of a preaching tone while turning his gaze in Schera’s direction.

The map was torn, put in the hole, and then violently covered with soil. They stamped on the soil with their military boots. They dealt with it in a way to not leave any vestiges behind. A “That’s good enough,” signaled the end for everyone.

“If I feel like it.”

“Start putting in some effort and feel like it.”

“Okay. By the way, are you my Dad?”

“I have a cute son waiting for me at home. Sorry, but I can’t be your dad. Go find a nice guy with your own power.”

“Very unfortunate.”

While having this frivolous talk. Schera tried imagining her formerly existing parents. However, she couldn’t dig up any memories. She did not particularly think it unfortunate in the slightest however. Her hatred towards the Royal Capital Liberation Army was certain. Her recollections of her village being destroyed were certain. Nevertheless, she could not remember the faces any of the people who should have been there. She did not think that sad. What she could recall that was sad, was only that deathly sense of hunger.

—-Yes. The only thing she recalled was that maddening feeling of starvation.

Schera silently threw the last bean in her mouth. She violently crushed it and was not aware of its taste.

Liberation Army, Intelligence Corps: A concealed, dilapidated house.
Normally, only scouts would use this spot, but this evening, a single commander of the Liberation Army, Colonel Voleur, was visiting for an inspection in the face of the enemy. Voleur was a senior military officer sent from the Empire’s army as reinforcement.
He had a tall physique and his muscles were bulging. The military genius he was born with had been habitually tempered and then further polished.
His skill with the spear was recognized as distinguished even among all of the Empire. As a spearmanship instructor, he also served as the instructor for second-in-command Second Prince Alan. His fortitude and vigor were beloved by the soldiers, and he also possessed talent as a commander.

“Well done continuing your task late into the night. I come to ascertain the situation with Antigua Branch Castle with my own eyes.”

“Colonel, Your Eminence need not to have come. The situation here is the same as usual. …… Please, use this.”

“I will.”

One scout passed an eyepiece to Voleur. This magic tool which had a special enchantment placed on it could project the scenery across the lens like it was daytime. It was a technology excavated from a certain Labyrinth City. It was an item permitted to be held by only commissioned officers tethered to the Empire’s Intelligence Corps.

“I view everything through the lens of, ‘Is this a trap meant to lower our guards?’ Please, take a look at the main tower over there.”

Voleur turned the eyepiece in the direction that the Intelligence Corps member pointed out. Inside the rampart walls was a blatantly conspicuous tower. It was surely a watchtower used to discover the enemy. However, the lookout was leaning against the wall with not a single movement.

"……The lookout is sleeping on the job. Has discipline fallen apart?"

Voleur murmured with an amazed tone while ascertaining the state of affairs of Antigua Branch Castle through the eyepiece.

"It is quite rare for there to be a lookout that takes his post seriously. While we are maintaining a sense of tension, it is making it quite hard."

"Nevertheless, absolutely do not be negligent. The enemy must as well have someone incredibly sharp. The Kingdom would not have lasted up until today otherwise."

Voleur passed the eyepiece back to the scout and gave a warning.

"Orders understood, Colonel Voleur. ……Something tripped our cordon. I will go confirm immediately."

The special warning cordon had been developed according to the Empire's sorcery technology, and it had been uniformly laid out around the perimeter of the dilapidated house. One subordinate man utilized an eyepiece and went to identify that something.

"……They appear to be deserters mentioned by a contact. They number ten. No, eleven. There is one person more than the contact indicated."

"There were people who deserted before, too. At this critical moment, these guys are also deciding to huh. After asking them the usual questions, lead them to the Liberation Army Headquarters. Don't forget to take their documents from the spy."

"Understood."

"……The Intelligence Corps, has it been guiding the deserters?"

Voleur enquired while rubbing his chin.

"Yes. Orders from our tactician–we are to act to further pressure interior collapse. The number of deserters have already surpassed a thousand. Of the betrayers we receive contact from, there have even been those who have reached a superior rank after starting from the bottom. ……At any rate, the fruits of our efforts should be apparent."

There were a great many people who held animosity towards the Kingdom. It had been easy work to take advantage of them. The people who naturally came to sell out the Kingdom were not few.

"……That so. So the Kingdom has started rotting from the inside."

"Yes. It is exactly as you say."

A giant tree could have an imposing appearance on the outside but could be completely decomposed on the inside. Even if nothing was done to it, it would

miserably wither, and its collapse would only be a matter of time. In that case, the Intelligence Corps was responsible for the duty of hastening that process.

"I would like to ask the deserters about the situation inside. Do you mind?"

"……I am not quite in agreement. There is no way those guys have sworn loyalty to the Princess. As they are, they ran away because of their dissatisfaction. I am saying this just in case."

The Intelligence Corps member warned, but Voleur shook his head sideways saying there was nothing to fear.

"'What if we were sneak attacked by the deserters,' I am also a man who takes that into consideration. I will have you let me ask them for information, with these ears firsthand."

"……Understood. However, please allow us to accompany you. If anything were to happen to the Colonel, we would be held responsible."

When the group member cracked a smile, Voleur dryly laughed.

"Heheh, when you have a subordinate with a strong sense of responsibility, it's quite troubling."

"When one has a strong willed superior officer, there are various troubles."

Voleur exited the small shed, and the Intelligence Corps members on standby followed after him.

"I am Colonel Voleur, member of the Empire Loyalty Battalion of the Royal Capital Liberation Army. Are you the people who have come from Antigua Branch Castle?"

"Y-yes. That is correct! We have escaped from the castle to join the Liberation Army spearheaded by Princess Alturia! F-from now on, we will expend our lives and fight for the Royal Capital Liberation Army!"

Shamelessly fibbed the Platoon Leader.
Voleur knew that, yet he solemnly nodded his head. After all, as far as a single, private soldier was concerned, hegemony wars were just that kind of thing.

"……Umu. We heartily welcome the arrival of comrades of the same mind. Hereon, under the Liberation Army, I would like you to freely wield your strength."

"Sir-!"

The Platoon Leader, and the rest of the soldiers respectfully bowed. Voleur gazed over the faces of all of them one by one.
But, his gaze stopped, on a single soldier holding a peculiar weapon.

"—-Girl. What's so funny, will you let me hear?"

"……."

"I'm asking you why you had that smile plastered on your face this entire time."

"—-Aha, Ahaha-! What is so funny, you ask? Everything, everything! It's so amusing, I just can't help it!"

"What?"

"I mean, 'We have escaped from the castle to join the Liberation Army!' He said something like that so seriously, yet, he ran away because he didn't want to die in reality!"

Schera laughed while holding her stomach, now no longer able to hold back.
The Intelligence Corps members on standby scowled and reached for their personal weapons. If she continued her disrespect any further, they planned to immediately dispose of her.

"H-Hey, that's impolite! Schera!! Stop!"

The Platoon Leader reached out his hand to restrain Schera, but she sharply swatted it away.

"Oh no. Could a dog of the rebel army not touch me? You aren't my ally anymore after all."

"—-H-Hey Schera!! Are you being serious-!!?"

"You, so you haven't come to join our Liberation Army?"

Voleur posed the question. As killing intent had been released from Schera, this would be the final question.
He grasped the spear tightly and strengthened his grip.

"Isn't it clear that I haven't. All this sneaking around, I've come to hunt you eyesore hounds. The larger the prey, the sooner I can become distinguished, right?"

"Hey Schera!! N-no that's not it. Please forgive her somehow. T-this person is a little disabled in the head."

The Platoon Leader went to plead for Schera's life, but she swept him away, saying he was an annoyance.

"Can you not treat people like idiots? Being protected by a dog, it kind of hurts my feelings."

Seeing this play out, Voleur let out a large sigh.

"—-So that's your answer. It seems you've gone mad due to the stormy army life. Now, I'll give you peace."

"Please stop Colonel! For someone like this, we will deal with her!"

“Your worry is not needed. I at least have some pity. I cannot bring myself to raise my hand against a girl of such tender age, but there is no other remedy. Her appearance is already that of a rabid dog. I can’t bear to look.”

With a wave of his hand, Voleur stopped the Intelligence Corps members and took a stance with easy movements.

After several seconds, Schera would die. She would be no match for such a large man, and furthermore a Liberation Army’s Colonel. Nothing could be done for the deserters anymore. They would get implicated and die surely. What they could do, was only swallow the saliva held in their mouths due to tension and ascertain Schera’s final moments.

However, Schera, despite their worry, took a step forward with a cheerful expression.

“Fufu-, for the sake of my delicious food. —-Sorry, but will you die for me?”

Strength entered her body, and she flourished the large scythe held in her hands. Schera’s lips warped, and she pointed her scythe at Voleur.

Chapter 4: Bright Red Meat Pies are Delicious

With regards to the history of the Mundo Novo Continent, it would probably be correct to say that most if not all stories produced in future posterity would be about this time period. Starting from the battle of demons for Labyrinth City Arte, there was the break up of the Star Church, the formation of the Royal Capital Liberation Army, the Kingdom Civil War, and then this stour heading towards The Great War.

Many heroes would appear, heroic epics would be left behind as numerous as the stars, and then they would be handed down for generations.

Of all of the stories, the one most popular with the people of the New Kingdom would be the one about Altura Yuze Unicafe, the young princess spearheading the the Liberation Army.
In place of her deceased father exiled after losing a war of succession, she was a beloved character who rose up for the unhappy, suffering, and oppressed citizens. In the end, she was a woman who struck down the incompetent king, established the New Yuze Kingdom, and reigned as its first generation Queen. In her biography, she was a woman of honest speech and conduct, a woman who charmed the heart of many people with her behavior, and a woman of much fascination.

The runner up in popularity would probably be the story of the Second Prince of the Empire, Alan, who after The Great War became Altura's husband. It was a love story of the bonds between a man and women of hostile nations, and despite the many exaggerations mixed in, it spawned many narratives. It was highly valuated from a military perspective, and the fights he participated in are considered excellent exhibitions of leadership. It was written down in Yuze Kingdom history that he did everything he could to negotiate with his home country, the Empire, and he continued to counsel harmoniously from beside the Queen.

In addition to those characters, many others were mentioned: there was the man who left his town and started walking the road of a hero, Fynn, the tactician who lead the Liberation Army to victory, Diener, and the Invincible General, Behrouz.

In the shadow of the magnificent glory of the winners, there existed history of the vanquished too.
In the role of the villains, the ones who appeared most often were probably veteran army general Sharov, the Indominable Yalder, and his loyal retainer, Sidamo. High noble David and prime minister Farzām were also recorded.
Of course, the works were heavily distorted when convenient, and they had the thankless role of being utterly crushed by the Liberation Army.

In all those perverted literary works, or rather biographies, was a single character whose portrayal stood out ever more distinct.
—-[Death God, Schera Zade]
In the frail army of the Kingdom, she was a female commissioned officer who spilled the most blood of the Royal Capital Liberation Army. She took the family name [Zade] sometime midway, and details of her descent were completely unknown. She was a

character so mysterious that even her age was uncertain. This girl's name first appeared onstage, front-and-center, at the Alucia Engagement. It was the first battle between the large scale armies of the Kingdom and the Royal Capital Liberation Army. 80,000 was the fighting force of the Kingdom, and 40,000 for the Royal Capital Liberation Army.
It was a battle that the Kingdom would win, they had believed. Not one of the Kingdom's executives had doubted it.

Antigua Branch Castle, Northern Woodlands, Deserted House.
Voleur had been completely repulsed by a girl young enough to be his own daughter. His thrust with his body weight behind it that had been fired to quickly do her in had been lightly brushed aside. This girl's blow had been of such weight that he had almost accidentally dropped his spear. Voleur had changed his mindset, and he was increasing the severity his attacks.
Thrust. Sweep. Strike.
He attacked with every method of offense he had, but he could not inflict any wounds. Schera nimbly moved and only deflected attacks deemed unavoidable with her large scythe. And then, she would start grinning like a fool.
Like she was waiting for Voleur to exhaust all his stamina.

It had been several minutes, or maybe several tens of minutes. With sweat running down from his cheeks, it was finally time that Voleur's breathing became haggard.

"Well then, this time I'll be the one attacking."

"——Ha- Ha-"

"Make sure to parry. Just like I had done."

Schera started her attack in the exact way Voleur had before her. The bulky Voleur was unable to evade as he would of liked, and the tempered blade protruding from the handle of the large scythe pierced through his armor. His steel armor that could even deflect arrows was destroyed with ease. It was preposterous to try to somehow parry the crash of the downward swung large scythe with his large spear.
Just what was that thing made of.
For now, every single blow had such tremendous weight. Both his hands were numb. His knees were quivering. He was bleeding, and his stamina was starting to run out.

"Kuh-! You bastard, what kind of person are you? You can't be, just a single common soldier."

"Schera"

Schera spun her scythe when she bared her teeth and answered.

"If left alive, you would surely become a calamity of the Liberation Army. Right here, I absolutely have to kill you."

“Do your best ‘kay.”

“You swine-!!”

His waist lowered, Voleur thrusted with every fiber of his being. It was at a speed the onlookers watching in amazement around him could not at all cognize. It was a flawless strike joined with tangible fighting spirit.
It had been a strike magnificent to that degree. Had been that is.

“—-Ri-ridiculous.”

“Oops, too slow it seems. Well then, I’ll have that head of yours.”

The blow with all his might behind it appeared to have gotten through to her.
The extended spear was entangled with the large scythe, and tip was forced into the ground. The instant he leaked out a cry of shock, the curved blade like a snake slithered, and Voleur’s trained neck was easily severed.

“C-colonel Voleur—-”

“Th, the Colonel was”

The Intelligence Corps members were lost for words. The deserters could do nothing but look at the spectacle in front of their eyes in amazement.

“With this guy’s head, it seems I’ll be able to eat some delicious food again. It was worth coming along with those dogs all the way out here.”

Schera cheerfully smiled while casually gripping the head that had a look of regret.
One Intelligence Corps member thought to put an end to that recklessness.

—-That instant.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

“Can you not get in the way?”

“M-My eye, my eye issssss-!!!”

With no prior movements, a small sickle used for trimming grass concealed on her waist was thrown into the Intelligence Corps member’s face. The tip of the small sickle with a mean cutting edge viciously stabbed into the eye socket of the Intelligence Corps member.
After he had writhed in pain and sloppily rolled around,
“Noisy,” and an attack was inflicted on the crown of the pitiful man’s head with the scythe’s handle, and he no longer let out even a single cry.

The remaining Intelligence Corps members were filled with excess terror and they started trembling. Approaching them in front of their eyes was an existence that was the incarnation of Death. Already, in these guys’ eyes, they saw her not as a girl, but

only as the shadow of Death, and there was no way they could win against Death. The only road available for these people who were overwhelmed was to pray.

"Well now, I wonder if I should go treasure hunting. I expressly came all the way out here; bringing back just a head is boring."

Leaving behind the weaklings standing stock still, Schera entered the dilapidated house with the scythe on her shoulder. After a short time, sounds of a violent struggle came from inside, and after extremely gruesome screams could be heard, the now bloodstained Schera came out in a good mood.

While stuffing her cheeks with a red-dyed meat pie.

"I'll be borrowing this eyepiece since it seems handy. The owner can no longer use them, so he won't mind."

It was the magical instrument eyepiece that the Intelligence Corps had been using just before. This clearly wasn't something good to hand over.
—-But.

"……Sp-spare us."

"Oh yeah. What should I do I wonder."

"T-take them with you. We won't mind. So, so, don't kill us. Please. Sp-spare us."

This Intelligence Corps member who would not talk even under torture had fear welling up from the bottom of his heart. The basic fear of having one's soul reaped drew near before his very eyes. It was dreadful and unbearable.

"In exchange for this meat pie, I will spare you. You're, quite lucky. You might've used up an entire life's worth of luck. Your life from now own, be careful okay?"

Schera slowly whispered in a soft voice with condescending laughter into the ears of the trembling Intelligence Corps member.

Since her luggage had increased, 'Isn't there anything useful I could use?' thought Schera as she started looking around the vicinity. When she heard a whinny from behind the small house, she discovered a finely built, black horse.
It was Voleur's favorite horse that he had used to come to this dilapidated house.
At the sudden appearance of a person, the horse intensely neighed and drew back, but when Schera glared at it with narrowed eyes, it stopped stirring about like it had been struck by lightning.

"From now on, I will use you. Let us cordially advance onto the battlefield together."

When Schera gently brushed him, the horse lowered its head in front of Schera, as if completely submitting himself to her. With a few pats and a soothing "there there," she nimbly jumped atop and gripped the reins. Her display of easily handling the large horse proved her to be an expert.

"W-wait Schera. What, what should we do?"

The deserted Platoon Leader hurriedly came to ask Schera who was just about to depart. If left behind in this a place, they would be accused of being responsible for the colonel who lost his head likely.
Having said that, they could not just return to Antigua Branch Castle. There was only one punishment handed down to deserters: the death penalty.

"Hell if you stay. Hell if you return. Isn't it fine just to pick whichever you like? Choosing is the only happiness left you for guys."

"N,no way."

"Should I end you for you? Reward for the trip here."

"H-hii-!"

When she pointed her scythe at the Platoon Leader, his legs gave out. Maybe his situation was funny; Schera let out a quick laugh. She gently put the half-eaten meat pie into the waistpouch and dusted off her hands. Dried blood was smeared on her hands. Or not just her hands, but even her entire body, but Schera didn't notice that at the moment.

"Well then, goodbye. If fate decides it, see you later."

With a light wave her hand, she kicked the horse's abdomen, and they started galloping vigorously. In her hand was Voleur's head, and on her back was her large scythe.

Antigua Branch Castle, Interrogation Room.
Schera who had spurred on her horse and gaudily repatriated was of course seen by the lookouts, bound, and taken for questioning. All the more because in her hand seemed to be the head of the enemy commander.

"……And so, you accompanied the deserters, took the head of the enemy commander, who just happened to be there, seized his horse, and then repatriated. Is that what you are saying?"

"Exactly. I've said it many times before right."

"What an absurd story. Who would believe it? ……Is what I want to say, but the head of the enemy commander is the real thing. Affiliated with the Empire's army, spearmanship instructor Voleur, no doubt about it."

"Well then. Isn't this good enough? I'm tired and hungry. I wonder, isn't it about time to release me?"

After stretching out her hands and loudly yawning, Schera reached into her waist

pouch and took out her half-eaten meat pie.
The meat pie dyed bright-red was her spoil of war. The smell of iron and a savory smell met and mixed together. She opened her mouth wide and was about to take a bite, but she was hindered, and it was tragically, roughly plundered.
Schera's complexion instantly changed.

"You are in the middle of a hearing. Eating can wait after——!?"

"—-Hey. If you don't want to be beheaded, immediately return my meat pie-! I won't say it a second time okay? Come, Hurry up-!!"

Schera abruptly reached out her right hand and tightened her vice-like grip around the neck of the military policeman. It was just a small hand, but the military policeman was starting to hear disgusting, creaking sounds. Her facial expression had become ferocious like a that of a starving beast.

"Guh, Wa-, wai-. Return it, j, just, let, go"

The military policeman who had decided he would be killed at this rate, let go and dropped the stolen meat pie in front of Schera's eyes.

"……Can you not interrupt my meal? Please and thank you."

Schera's dangerous appearance immediately took an about face, and she was in a good humor stuffing herself.
The military police officer, though violently coughing *Goho goho*, looked over his shoulder at the door behind him. He sent his gaze which said, 'please give me a break,' to the man examining from behind the observation window.

The person observing was the man with the title Third Army Chief Staff Officer. It was Sidamo Arte. With a profound sigh, he opened the door to the interrogation room and entered.

Sidamo had been troubled over the increasing numbers of deserters. He soundly knew that there was a betrayer in the midst of them, but never did he expect that he completely overlooked the gatekeeper. Inconceivable. Due to Schera's testimony, the secret collusion actions of the gatekeeper were settled, and he was immediately restrained and executed.
He had thought it would be over with that, but then he was surprised by the head the girl in question brought back.
No doubt about it, it was the man who served as the bodyguard for the imperial family at the memorial ceremony formerly held in three countries.
That Sidamo had recollection left of him was because Sidamo attended and was in charge of security from the Kingdom's side.
From appearances, he was a grave, warrior type of person, and even if Sidamo was wrong, he was not an opponent a young girl could take on. Yet, the reality was that Voleur, who ought to have been flourishing on the battlefield, had his head detached from his body.

—-In other words, this girl, Schera, was someone stronger than Voleur.

Stupid, but this was reality. He could only recognize it.

"……You're Temporary Second Lieutenant Schera? Assault towards military police is a

crime of treason. Take care and act accordingly.”

“Sir-. Please forgive my discourtesy.”

“Also, cease talking while eating. That is defamation of a superior officer.”

“…….Sir-!”

Schera forcibly inhaled the meat pie, stood up from her seat, and saluted. At that action, Sidamo further knitted his brows together. In the end, was his judgement correct, or was it not correct? He was gradually losing confidence in himself.

“First of all, for the discovery of the turncoats. Well done. The increasing numbers of deserters was giving me a headache.”

“Sir-!”

“Due to that achievement, the title [Temporary] will be taken from you. Hereafter, you will squarely have the title of Second Lieutenant.”

“Thank you very much!”

“Then, for the execution of enemy commander Voleur. His Excellency Yalder would also be pleased. Because he is busy with work right now preparing for an offensive, he is unable to give you any further reward.”

“……”

“Therefore, at my own discretion, for this current military operation as far as you are concerned, I have recommended you for a special duty unit. However, you will be detached from the duty of commanding your current platoon and be put in a detached force. If you distinguish yourself, I can guarantee that you can anticipate further promotions. How about it, do you aspire? Of course, this is not obligatory.”

“Sir-, Second Lieutenant Schera, aspires!”

She immediately replied without a second of hesitation.

“……Very well. Details will be left for later, and instructions will be given. For now, rest your body. You are dismissed!”

“Sir-! Please excuse me!”

After performing a splendid salute, Schera withdrew, closing the door.
The instant Schera left the inspection room. “Ahh, I’m not used to that way of speaking. So tired.” The leaked out complaint was said in a ridiculously loud voice, and of course, it even reached Sidamo’s ears. “Let’s hurry and eat.” He could also completely hear that.

“I guess my judgement was mistaken. ……You, what do you think?”

“Sidamo-sama, I think your judgement and discernment is correct. That girl is most likely. ……No, no mistake, she is a monster.”

“……Is that so.”

Looking at the military policeman whose life was spared and appeared relieved from the bottom of his heart, Sidamo folded his arms and brooded for awhile.

Chapter 5: Carrots Have Good Consistency; Delicious

Royal Capital Liberation Army Headquarters, Salvador Fortress
The heads of all the commissioned officers were having a final war council aimed towards the engagement expected to arrive in the near future.

"As per information from our scouts, as expected, the enemy's main force means to expand to the Alucia Plains. There is almost no mistake as information from the betrayers also indicates this."

"Then it is a frontal attack, wouldn't you say so. Their ambush in the woodlands failed, and they also have to cross the river. Judging from General Yalder's personality, one that believes in [Strength in Numbers], he is thinking of coming at us from the front."

The Tactician Diener disinterestedly murmured while placing a knight-piece, representing one unit, on the map spread out on the desk.

"How is the usual construction going?"

"We have conducted construction work all around the predicted enemy invasion route. We will finish before long, it is said."

"We're playing tricks on them, is what they are probably thinking. Our forces are in reality weaker than theirs. This will be suitable bait to catch the Kingdom's forces."

"Now that the Tactician-dono has read this far, the rest is work for us officers and men yeh. My arm is tingling!"

Said the fifty-year-old senior commander, Behrouz. Unhappy with the Kingdom's deterioration, he was a man with an abundance of morality who lead his men to join the Liberation Army. Steady fights were customary to him, and he could calmly judge the progress of battle.

"So everything is complete."

"However, we cannot limit ourselves to progressing according to plan. We do not know what will occur. This is a battlefield."

Mildly warned Deiner at Altura's nodding her head in satisfaction. Altura spontaneously made a bitter smile and replied,

"I know. Even a single moment of hesitation is taboo. I was taught that ad nauseum after all.

"In times when the wind is at one's back, the nerve to holdfast is necessary. Even looking at history up until now, there have been many cases of people with extravagant merit who have fallen to ruin. For the sake of the citizens, we must absolutely not permit a repeat of the same mistakes."

The arrayed commissioned officers silently agreed at those words. Incompetent statesmen. Harsh despotism. Widespread disorder in domestic public safety. They would liberate the citizens from all of them and once again return the Kingdom to its former affluence. That was the Royal Capital Liberation Army's mission, their raison d'etre.

"We are also backed with the full might of the Empire. At the dawn when the Princess takes the throne, we will bring about perpetual peace in the continent of Mundo Nuovo."

"We are grateful to you, Prince Alan. We have again and again received care packages, volunteer soldiers, and we have even been graciously furnished with magic weapons. That we have been to stand on our own this far is all thanks to you."

"We only work in accordance with His Majesty The Emperor's decree. And what ultimately moved His Majesty's heart was your fidelity for the citizens. That by no means proved trivial. No one other than you exists that can lead the Liberation Army."

"……Thanks, Prince Alan."

Real Motive or Public Facade. It was obvious which. It was unthinkable that the greatest leader of the Keyland Empire would support being manipulated by the naive ideal of 'For the citizens.'
Even though the Empire had been hit by the effects from the large crop failure, their frenetic internal regulations did not change. The increasing insurrection, the multiplying number of bandits, the swelling war expenditures–The Empire barely managed to maintain control one step before discontent would explode and nothing more.
However, their sworn enemy the Kingdom had it rougher. Its incompetent King had not the faculty to suppress dissatisfaction, and it would be suffice to say that it was already too late for the crumbled public order. Piled onto that was the timing of the Royal Capital Liberation Army uprising.
This was the greatest chance for the Empire to raise a liberation army, aggressively support it, and have it bear the full front of overthrowing the Kingdom.
They organized a volunteer army, devised to further augment its war potential by sending in the Second Prince to the liberation army, and once this event was realized, they would seize the initiative.

Alan, the individual second in command of the Liberation Army, had no such whimsical thoughts to that extent. He had been captivated by Altura's charm, and he thought to honestly aid her as an individual person.
After all, the one to inherit the imperial throne would be the eldest son, and he was no more than a spare.

"Excuse me! I have come with urgent information!"

In the strategy conference room came in a soldier looking flustered. One group of generals scowled, but they had inferred from the soldier's appearance that it was bad news.

"……Disorderly. Calm down and report. You are wasting time and stamina like this."

"S-sir-! Please forgive me! Presently, the Intelligence Corps members sent to reconnoiter Antigua Branch Castle have repatriated but—-!"

"If I'm not mistaken, Voleur should have proceeded to inspect enemy movements last night."

"Y-yes but. According to enemy soldiers, now deserters, Colonel Voleur has been killed."

"……."

Alan displayed an expression of doubt. He could not believe that that robust soldier had been killed so suddenly. Judging that it was probably a mistake from an incorrect report, he opened his mouth.

"How idiotic. Voleur's spearmanship is peerless even throughout the Empire. He wouldn't be killed by something like a Kingdom soldier. Go get a confirmation one more time; there's a chance this is some sick joke."

"……The, the Colonel's corpse has been brought here. I, I have confirmed it with my very own eyes. That appearance was Colonel Voleur's. The Intelligence Corps members have also witnessed the whole story from beginning to end, so there is no mistake."

Voleur's body had had multiple wounds. His head had been cut off, and it couldn't be known what kind of expression he had as he met his end.

"……Do we know who he was killed by?"

"Well, that is. The troop members were in a crazed confusion. They only repeatedly said that it had been done by a God of Death, and we could not get out of them any detailed circumstances. Also, the deserters who happened to be present have been taken into custody. According to them, it was a young girl wielding a large scythe—-."

"Immediately guide me there. I will ascertain this with my very own eyes. By a God of Death, a large scythe wielding little girl? Illogical. Cannot be understood at all."

"Pl-Please excuse me. The Colonel's body is over here."

Everyone from the Empire who had come to assist, even Alan, followed, guided by the soldier. After seeing them off, Tactician Diener opened her mouth.

"Princess. This is a battlefield. There is danger at anytime of Death visiting anyone. Friends, lovers, brothers. All of them can all of a sudden become meaningless corpses. Do you have the determination to come to grips with this overflowing anguish from now on?"

"—-Naturally. Above a great many corpses and blood I stand. At the same time, I will minimize the number of victims. That, is my duty, as a commander of the Liberation Army, and my calling as royalty. Never will I run away."

Altura closed her eyes and put her hand to her chest.

"We staff officers, generals, and even the soldiers. We devote our body and soul for

the materialization of the Princess's dream."

Diener silently lowered his head, and the military officers raised their arms overhead and shouted,

"FOR THE VICTORY OF THE LIBERATION ARMY"

"FOR THE PUBLIC PEACE OF THE KINGDOM'S CITIZENS"

"LONG LIVE PRINCESS ALTURA"

—-The Royal Capital Liberation Army sallied towards the Alucia Plains.

Heading towards Alucia Plains, en route, The Third Army Corps.
Sidamo was reporting to General Yalder

"According to information from our scouts, the enemy's main force has also departed for the Alucia Plains."

"I see. So rather than being confined and crushed, they chose to be grandly annihilated on the plains. They've saved us much trouble!"

"There are reports that the enemy scout unit has been conducting work on the plains. However, we do not have any details."

"Have they been excavating pitfalls?"

"Unknown, however, it seems that they have mobilized a large number of people."

To head to Salvador Fortress, one could cross the plains, navigate the woodlands, or take a detour route and cross the Alucia River.
Jira's Division which had been annihilated a few days ago had launched a surprise attack through the woodlands. If they were to do the same, it would probably take several multiples of hours if they were to be alert for traps or take a detour.
For the Third Army who did not have a surplus of food, that route they didn't want to take. Furthermore, the danger known as crossing a river was something they did not want to risk.

"There is no need for something as dull as a detour. We, the heavy armored Steel Division, will trample everything, watch us!"

"Exactly, That they are using tricks or traps is proof that they are in difficult times. A simple frontal attack would be to our behoof."

Advised Major General Kyros leading the heavy cavalry and Major General Dhanush

leading the heavy infantry. They were both born from distinguished families and had definite promise of being promoted in the future. For the sake of coming out on top of a factional dispute, they wanted to earn achievements no matter the cost. Jira, who was one of their rivals, went and perished on his own accord, and they were snickering inwardly.

"Umu. Certainly, we will not go so far as to detour. Rather, a detour like a river crossing is dangerous. As per the art of war, we would likely be attacked while defenceless."

"Certainly."

"I am resolved. There is no need to go out of our way and waste more time."

"……Speaking of which, Sidamo. What about the detached force you arranged for?"

"Sir-, under supervision, 3000 light cavalry have already deployed. They exited the woodlands a few days ago and are tasked with an attack on the enemy food storehouse."

An organized force composed of only 3,000 light cavalry had taken a route separate from the main body and were told to assault the enemy food storehouse. After having experienced being devastated by a surprise attack, the enemy would not expect them to take the same course of action, or so they planned to outsmart the enemy.
On the other hand, even if the enemy had foreseen their movements, then they could divide the enemy's main force. This was an unloseable plan.

"Well done. Good if it goes to plan, and even if found out, we can at the very least divide the the enemy's forces. With no disadvantages, what a splendid plan, Chief Officer Sidamo. Our victory is assured."

"I am honored to receive such a lavish praise. Also, the soldier that had killed General Voleur of the Empire has also been admitted as second in command according to my recommendation. She has little experience leading, but she possesses considerable strength. She will probably prove useful after this to Your Excellency."

It had been unprecedented, but a Second Lieutenant rank had been recommended for second in command of the detached force. Not for her leadership skills, but for her outstanding armed might, or so Sidamo anticipated.

"Hohh. I look forward to it. After this battle, I'll absolutely promote her. Still, to have been killed by a single soldier, seems like those guys who came as support all the way from the Empire aren't that big a deal. Or is it because our Kingdom is just too excellent?"

Yalder let out a hearty laugh. Seeing Voleur's head had cleared up the humiliation of defeat from few days ago. In a good humor after kicking around the head as much as he wanted, he had went so far as to go drink.

"Our Kingdom's soldiers are overwhelmingly superior. They are the product of habitual, rigorous training and Your Excellency's leadership.

"After all, the rebel army is just a mish mash of troops. It will not change that they are just a gathering of thieves. Also, that lot from the Empire who came to assist the

insurgents are merely effeminate soldiers and brainless commanders. There is no path for victory against us, the greatest elite of the Kingdom. Moreover, we are spearheaded by Your Excellency Yalder, the foremost general of the Kingdom's army."

"Hahaha-! You give absolutely splendid flattery!! Once we successfully exterminate the rebel army, next is the Empire. Then, we will once again merge, and our Yuze Kingdom will then unify the continent, would you say!?"

"Your Excellency Yalder's promotion to Field Marshal is assured. After all, the proof is that The Third Army Corps is the Kingdom's most elite."

"Field Marshal Sharov is of considerable age. There is no one suitable but you to be the keystone of the Kingdom after this. We swear our loyalty to you all the more."

Flatter Kyros and Dhanush.

"Your Excellency could doubtlessly become the Hero of the Kingdom."

Sidamo said, not wanting to lose. For the revival of the fallen and ruined House of Arte, he must have the top reach of Yalder–without fail, for the sake of washing away the dishonor of his now deceased older brother.
For that sake, he would throw away all his pride and go to the top from this social position.

"I will by no means forget your labour for me. Let us seize glory together!"

"Sir-!!"

—-Kingdom Army, Third Army Corps, as planned continued to march towards Alucia Plains.
Schera's assigned calvary had exited the Northern Woodlands and were rushing towards the Liberation Army's food warehouse. They numbered 3,000.

"Hey, Second Lieutenant Schera. How about not eating in the middle of riding a horse?"

Called out a man of a tender age, turning towards Schera riding side by side with him.

"Eat in times when one can eat. That is my motto. If I become hungry, I cannot fight to my fullest. This is inexcusable, but I cannot follow your orders."

"No, it is not an order but. ……Well whatever. Your strength that took out Voleur, I have high expectations. I received a recommendation from Chief Staff Officer Sidamo personally. I intend for you too to make a desperate effort."

The commanding officer of the cavalry unit was dubious, but the Chief Staff Officer had talked to him, so there was probably no mistake.

Her horsemanship radiated completely from her body, and she was not a hindrance to the march. Even compared to members of the Cavalry, she would fare well. He wondered where she got such skills but did not ask anything, because as a commander, she was nothing more than an excellent subordinate. Once she was no longer useable, or got herself killed, he would just quickly forget about her.

"Sir-."

Schera, while saluting, took out her uniformly cut carrots and started crunching on them like a rabbit. The horse that Schera was riding on looked pale as the sunlight and sweat made his body shine dully.

Chapter 6: Chocolate is Sweet and Delicious

Royal Capital Liberation Army, Food Storehouse, Outskirts Campground. The Liberation Army furnished 1,000 regular soldiers for defense.
Furthermore, they invested a large amount of money and employed a mercenary force of 3,000 strong. Their discipline was slack, but they were a well-equipped infantry force.
Tactician Diener had been expecting an assault a second time. However, he couldn't divide any more fighting power away from the main battlefield, and he was only barely able to station this amount of soldiers on defense.
—-Nevertheless, they were given the epitome of defense equipment.

"……Commanding Officer, the scum from the Kingdom are really coming. The strategist did say it was a fifty-fifty chance though."

"Well now. We will just do our jobs. Once they come, We'll kill every single last one of them. Simple right?"

"Let's tear it up; then the knights might be promoted. And then, you'll also join the nobility, Commanding Officer!"

"As long as I get paid that's enough. I ain't got much interest in nobility. Just what's there to be so envious about, I ain't understanding."

Spit out the Mercenary Commanding Officer, and the group member sighed.

"What a waste ain't it. With your skill, I bet you could make it, Commanding Officer"

"Excessive greed brings ruin onto oneself. People have their limits. It's good enough to just strive to not die."

"Yeah-! I got ya!"

"Do you really get it? ……Well whatever."

The Mercenary Commanding Officer stood up after finishing maintenance on his large sword. Their military strength was a little lacking to defend the storehouse, but he wasn't worried that much. Noisemakers had been laid out around the circumference, and furthermore, their trump card, Sorcery Landmines, had been laid out. They were also going to be used for the engagement this time, these new weapons.
Made of iron and as large as a human child, it looked like a wine barrel seen in bars. Ordinary at a glance, and junk if slandering it.
However, the magic power crammed into it was absurd, and if it exploded, it could inflict a great deal of damage.

There were wielders of large destructive power, so-called Sorcerers, but there was a reason why they were not often used on the battlefield. One couldn't gather a large amount of them, and they took time and money to train. Incidentally, if one raised someone with no talent, it would be impossible for them to utilize magic–that was

decided by the Magical Capacity they had from birth. No examples exist so far of people who have acquired that postnatally.

Moreover, it demanded considerable time to chant before using sorcery. The time to chant would increase in proportion to increasing power, and it could not be used continuously. There was also the fatal flaw that once one's magical power was exhausted, magic would become unusable. In other words, for large scale engagements, it would more efficient by far to mass produce cheap arrows and let them fly.
In the time it would take to unleash sorcery one time, ordinary soldiers could shoot 100 arrows. This was "Strength in Numbers."

Sorcery was just that inefficient, but its destructive power was guaranteed. Every nation conducted research, looking for a way to make it practical. By the Empire's Sorcery Engineering Department, and based the excavated technology from the Labyrinth City:
A weapon having the power of one Sorcerer had succeeded in being manufactured. That, was the Sorcery Landmine. It took a lot of time to make, to pour magic power into the special metal barrel, to write down the chant incantation, and to just be careful.
And then, when the Sorcerer would chant the keyword, or when the iron barrel detected an action that would make it detonate, it would immediately explode.
—-Simply put, it could also detonate simply by being stepped on.

"A scary weapon has finally been made man. Eventually, there'll come an era when we can't walk freely."

"The guys laying them have to be careful else they will be in danger too though."

"Honestly what an annoying matter. We also have to clear them or else."

"Tru dat!"

"——wait, woah-!!"

An earth-shattering explosion blasted underneath the soldiers that were joking around.

"——W, what!?"

"A landmine exploded from the forest!"

"Oi! Who tripped it!? The enemy, an ally!?"

Someone set off a landmine. While praying that it wasn't a comrade, they hastened to check.

"The flag of the Kingdom's Third Army! A raid from the enemy cavalry is coming!!"

"So they've come!"

The mercenary soldiers stood up.

"The enemy set off the landmines; their men and soldiers seem to be in disarray!"

A first news came from a reconnaissance soldier.

“This’s our best chance! Everyone has already completed preparations!”

“Let’s go Commanding Officer!”
“Finally a time to make some profit!”

“Alright, Regulars tighten the defences on the storehouse!! Mercenaries follow me! With the enemy in chaos, we’ll bring them down in one breath!!”

“Understood-!!”

The Mercenary Commanding Officer jumped onto his horse, unsheathed his large sword, and raised an enthusiastic shout to intercept them.

The Kingdom’s cavalry had fallen into turmoil. They had exited the woods and plunged into an open field area, and at the last moment when they were going to charge at the storehouse, they received some kind of attack. The ground had erupted, the horses were swept off their feet, and there were many victims among the soldiers. It was as if they had received a sorcerous attack. However, there was not a hint of a sorcerer figure.
The Cavalry Commanding Officer raised his voice while the color drained from his face.

“Heeeyyyy! We’ve come this far, we can no longer retrace our steps! Put your attitude in order and charge!! Attack!!”

“B-but Commanding Officer, our h-horses are stunned and are not listening to us!”

“Can’t you bastards handle even a single horse sufficiently!!? What was all the daily training for!?”

“E-even if you say that, shit, your orders—-”
“Damn it! Shit-, Arrows—-”
“C-commanding Officer, we are being shot at by bows! We have been found out!!”

Many arrows pierced the bodies of the unit soldiers having a difficult time pulling at the reigns. The Liberation Army garrison had noticed them. The Cavalry Commanding Officer’s spirits rose when the soldiers who rode on horseback arrived from the storehouse’s direction. Their opponents did not number many. They should be able to do it.
Or so the Cavalry Commanding Officer judged.

“We’ll be sniped at if we stay like this!! Those that can move follow me!! Forward-!!”

He hoisted his spear, kicked his horse’s stomach, and started the assault. Further explosions roared again behind him, but he did not have the luxury to turn around. He could hear the sounds of hoofbeats, so they probably had not been annihilated. No matter what damage they sustained, it would not be a problem if they could just destroy the storehouse. Strike and then break away was the cavalry’s duty.

—-Cavalry and cavalry crashed face to face, both with momentum behind them.

“Your head is mine!”

“Silence rebel scum! Become rust on my spear!”

“Just try it, dog of the Kingdom-!”

“HAAAAAAA-!!”

“TEYAAAAAAAAAAA–!!!”

The Cavalry Commanding Officer and the Mercenary Commanding Officer brandished their weapons and clashed.
The one who lost the bout,
—-was the Commanding Officer of the Cavalry.
Mercenary soldiers rushed to his body which had fallen off his horse. They too were frantic since if they took the head, they could get a monetary reward.

“The enemy commander has been killed!! Just like him, slaughter the Kingdom’s army-!!”

The Mercenary Commanding Officer vocalized from the depths of his stomach. This was for no other reason than to raise the morale of his comrades and to crush the enemy’s will. While shaking the clots of blood from his sword, he sonorously touted his sword.

“Ou-!!”
“If we win, we can expect a reward!”
“Kill them!”

The cavalry whose commander had been killed was completely disheartened. Individuals were surrounded and wounded, and their numbers diminished.

“S, Shit-! Hahh, stay away!”

“—-Woah, hehe- Like that spear will hit me!”

“You’re full of openings! Die-!!”

Aiming for the gap inbetween spear thrusts, a mercenary’s sword approached the body of the Kingdom’s soldier. That instant,

“—-eh?”

The face of the Kingdom’s soldier instantly was dyed bright red. The face of the enemy soldier that had been aiming at him was hideously gouged out and removed. It was the spurt of blood from that that had rained on his entire body.

“If your horse will not listen to you, then dismount and fight. Come on, if you do not want to die, hurry up!!”

“S, sir!!”

“Hereon, I will take over command!! If our opponents don’t have a leader, they are

just regular mercenaries! Calm down and kill them!!”

“Un, understood.”

“What a miserable voice, I’ll be the one to kill you!!”

“Understood-!!”

“Good-! Give them no quarter and mow them down-!!”

Schera inspired the cavalry with a heroic voice that did not match her visage. Even in this situation, her large scythe had harvested the lives of three mercenaries.

“—-I wonder if that mercenary guy is the commander. His movements are different from the others’.”

She identified a bearded horseman cutting down cavalry of the Kingdom with a large sword. She licked her lips, turned her beloved horse in his direction, and charged. Deciding to obstruct the charge from a rider, mercenaries gallantly turned their swords and spears towards her.
Schera massacred those riff-raff prey, flourishing her scythe like a windmill. Helmets were crushed, heads were severed, and blood spray gushed out from gouged limbs. Schera’s path of advance was immediately stained red.

“You’re the mercenary group’s commander-!? Your head please!!”

“A brat with a damn cheeky charade-!! Go to hell-!!”

“HAAA-!!”

When Schera held her scythe aloft resolutely, the mercenary Commanding Officer grinned and chuckled. His own large sword would clearly be faster. Faster than the large scythe could swing downward, his own sword would pierce her body.
He quickly visualized the path of his sword. His sword sailed with practiced movements. Satisfactory power went into his upper arm. It was a simple cut. His expertise in combat swordsmanship had gotten him out of life and death situations many times.

“I’ve got you!!”

“Slow.”

“—–!?”

The Mercenary Commanding Officer’s brandished sword was flicked away by the scythe’s handle, and there with his balance broken, Schera swung down her prized weapon with all her power.

The Mercenary Commanding Officer’s body was vertically cleaved in two. Helmet, armor, and the horse’s head were all involved.
‘Unbelieve,’ said his bloodshot eyes. His body opened up, and while a feeble breath leaked out from his oval mouth split in half, he died.

“It seems I went and made an artistic cadaver. Won’t this be hard to clean up?”

After gazing at the red-dyed body dead from their duel, she spun her large scythe to clean it and vigorously thrusted it at the skies.

“The enemy commander, has been killed!! Cavalrymen, continue to exterminate the dogs of the rebel army-!!”

This was an off-the-cuff mercenary force after all. If their commander that unified them were to be killed, they would promptly collapse.

“C, commander has been done in-!”
“Run! I ain’t gunna die in a place like this!”
“U-uwaaaaaa!!”

Mercenaries would absolutely not betray while receiving pay, but they would run. As the saying goes, Life Comes First, and they started fleeing.

“Kill them; don’t leave anyone alive!! Send every last one of them to hell-!!”

“O-Ou-!!”

“Follow Vice Commander Schera!!”

“Cavalry of the Kingdom, Charge!! Trample them-!! Squash them-!!”

With her face painted with blood, Schera gave her orders with a merry look. The cavalry members who had their morale forcibly pulled back up ran through the mercenaries who showed their backs and crushed them underfoot.

The Garrison Commander protecting the storehouse, seeing the mercenaries take to their heels, decided to evacuate. He took only some armaments and safely escaped without fighting. The goods there were of course valuable too, but he deemed that he could not lose his precious troops in this place. Moreover, this was not the only food storehouse. It was just that this one was the most used. Therefore, it would be best to avoid further wasting the lives of 1000 regular soldiers
Having judged that, the commander evacuated without a single crossing of swords.

The cavalry unit had sustained a little less than 500 casualties in the initial chaos. The mercenary company was almost annihilated, and the survivors had escaped to Salvador Fortress. It was Schera and her group’s victory, though they had lost their commander.

—-One hour later.
Having gained control of the food storehouse, the cavalry unit performed an inspection of the goods left behind. They carried away important documents and left behind the large quantities of food, weapons, and warhorses. Among those were several Sorcery Landmines, which had tortured Schera and company earlier, that had

been left behind. Naturally, they did not know what they were, and it happened that they would interrogate the mercenaries taken prisoner.

There were dozens of mercenaries taken prisoner with their hands bound behind their back, preventing them from moving around, and their miserable figures were brought before Schera.
Each and every face was caked with dirt, but there were none suffering from fatal injuries it seemed. They had rebellious expressions that showed they would flee if given a chance.

"Well then, I have some things I would like to ask you, I wonder if you do not mind."

"Heh-, like anyone would answer—-"

'Don't fuck with us,' said the prisoner who spit out a wad of sputum; his head was silently sent flying. Left behind, the torso of the sorrowful mercenary tumbled forward. Not only the prisoners, but the Kingdom's soldiers were also dumbfounded. As a consequence of his excessively defiant conduct, he was promptly silenced. They were shocked that a person could die so easily. It was as if he wasn't a human, but a vegetable being harvested.

"That's unfortunate. Then, next."

The crooked edge gleamed, and it stood in front of the next sacrifice. The prisoner twisted his body, trying to escape, but a soldier of the Kingdom held his shoulders firmly.

"Hi, hiii-!!"

"What is this, thing, used for? Will you tell me?"

Schera pointed at the metal barrel that had been moved behind her.

"Uh, t-that. It, it's just an ordinary barrel! It's for preserving foo—-

The man could not continue his words. Schera smiled and cut off his head.
That thing that had fallen there was in the way, so she briskly kicked it away. It tumbled around while scattering red fluid everywhere.

"Lies are no good okay? Aren't they just a waste of time?"

The large amount of blood that gushed out painted the bodies of the other prisoners. Schera walked in front of the next sacrifice.

"What is this, thing?"

"W-wait. We're just regular mercenaries–don't kill us! We'll fight for the Kingdom from"

"—-Next!"

His words were interrupted, and the large scythe swooped down. There were still many more sacrifices. The man who should have been the next sacrifice, unable to bear the terror, revealed the classified information.

“T, that, a Sorcery Landmine. It’s a weapon of the Empire that explodes when stepped on or directed to by a Sorcerer. I don’t know the details-. Really! S, so, don’t kill me! Please!”

“H, hey! The fuck you telling her for!? Do you not have any pride as a merce—-”

“Thanks for informing me. Only you will be spared.”

After slaughtering the prisoner that protested, she freed the man who answered from his bonds. Her expression was that of a normal girl’s smile. If her body was smeared with blood that is.

“Am, am I okay? R, really?”

“Hurry up and go. You, are truly a blessed man you know? Here, food and money. I’ll also give you one of the many horses over there. It’s fine if you also take a weapon you like. —-Well then, take care of yourself.”

Schera handed over a small bag with money and food in it and prompted him to quickly go away.
The man appeared that he could not believe it, but soon, shedding tears and with head lowered, he got on a horse and swiftly left.

“Vice Commander Schera! What about the rest?”

“We can’t take them with us. Kill everyone. I no longer have anything else to ask them. Spare no one and wipe them out.”

Schera ran her index finger sideways across her own neck. Seeing that, the soldier of the Kingdom shuddered and responded.

“Un, understood.”

“Make the execution swift and serene. It’s quite bad if you don’t cut precisely at the base you know? If you don’t do it properly, it’s awfully painful. Kill them assuredly.”

“Sir-!”

“No, no! Spare me!”
“I, I’ll say anything! So please wait-!”
“I don’t want to die!”

“Shut up! Act like adults-!”
“You’ve survived this long, have some shame-!”

The soldiers of the Kingdom poised with their weapons while shouting and started the judgement of the prisoners. Angry voices, jeers, and then screams of death agonies resounded at the storehouse many times.
Schera seemed to enjoy listening to them, while looking around the food warehouse and snatching food until she was completely satisfied. It was an all-you-can-eat, all-you-can-drink full course smorgasborg. ‘Is this heaven?’ Schera thought. She stuffed a disgusting amount of food into a cloth bag and fastened it to her horse.

“We should withdraw soon. I’m reluctant to, but as per the plan, we shall start the

fire. We don’t have time to eat everything. Truly unfortunate, but there’s no recourse.”

She said with a sorrowful expression, staring at the food piled high near her.

“Sir-!”

“Have you guys also grabbed as much food as you can? It would be a waste, so make sure to squeeze them in properly. One can’t fight sufficiently on an empty stomach wouldn’t you say?”

Schera viewed the horses of every group member. Every bag was full.

“A-as per your orders, we have stuffed them.”

“There’s no problem then. Ahh, let’s also take one of those Sorcery Landmines just in case. It’s heavy, but that can’t be helped.”

“Understood!”

The group members scattered oil and began to start preparations to set fire. Schera took a deep breath and jumped upon her horse.
To her rushed some cavalry with their faces changed color while kicking up a cloud of dust.

“—-Nn?”

“Vice Commander Schera!! Bad news-!!”

He was a cavalry performing a reconnaissance of the vicinity. His faces was taut with complete anxiety and cold sweat flowed like rain.

“What made you this flustered? I wonder, you seem so hungry that you’re about to die. If you’re fine with some bread, you can eat this one. It looks hard on the outside, but it’s quite good. It really is hard though.”

Schera took out a rock hard loaf of bread, but the cavalryman raised his voice, saying that this was not the occasion for it.

“T-this is not the occasion for bread-!!”

“You don’t like bread? We also have jerky if that’s the case.”

“I, I’m not hungry-! This is about A, Alucia Plains. Our Kingdom’s army was defeated! The Third Army Corps has sustained devastating casualties. General Yalder is currently on the retreat!!”

All the cavalry were astir with commotion. They could not believe this sudden information.

“Ridiculous. The Third Army was 80,000 strong! There’s no way they would lose to the rebel army!”

“I do not know the details! However, the reality is that the Kingdom’s army is being pursued!”
The soldier reported the defeat of the Kingdom’s army, and his breathing was rough.

He fell from his horse, sprawled out, and rested his body. His ridden horse was also on the verge of collapse–both men and horse probably used all their energy to run here. —-This information that they did not want to believe, was not false.

“Vice Commander Schera, we, have to hurry and pull back to Branch Castle Antigua. That enemy pursuit force will come along at any time now.”

“A report that their storehouse has fallen should have reached them I fear. It is just a matter of time until they return here!”

“Calm down. Acting confused is also no good. In times like this especially, be composed.”

Schera pulled out a luxury item, chocolate, from the bag fastened to her horse, and bit into it. Schera’s heart was vitalized by the bewitching sweetness.

“S, still!!”
“H, hey. Someone’s coming here again. A, are we okay!?”

Cavalry instructed with even more urgent information rushed to them. Their armor had many arrows protruding from it, and their blood flowed from their faces. They were cavalry heading towards troop headquarters to report the results of the battle. Having heard of the Third Army’s defeat, their destination was no longer Antigua Branch Castle however.

“A-Antigua has already fallen, and the Liberation Army’s flag is waving from it! O-our cavalry unit, is completely, is completely isolated!”

“R, ridiculous…”
“—-H, hey. This’s a joke right?”
“If that place has fallen, then, where do we return.”

The cavalry members had gone beyond agitation, and they could only be lost for words. This area was completely enemy-controlled territory. Nearby was enemy headquarters Salvador Fortress. The base of the Kingdom’s Army, Branch Castle Antigua, was occupied by the enemy. —-The cavalry numbered 2,500 all together. For them, there was no longer a place they should return to.

“V, Vice Commander Schera, we……”
“What, what should we do?”
“Vice commander Schera!”

To advance was hell. To return was hell. The information that their food storehouse had been attacked had probably already reached the enemy.
Furthermore, there was no doubt that the Liberation Army that had participated in the engagement was coming to surround them. Their situation was now switching to that of total annihilation.

Would they throw away their swords, dismount from their horses, and humiliatingly surrender? Or, would they assault the enemy stronghold and have the glory of dying in battle? Although it would be difficult, would they open up a means of escape and repatriate to the eastern region that was their homeland?

At any rate, as the current commander of this unit, Schera's decision would decide their fates.

"…….Want some chocolate?"

In response to the cavalry unit's gazes directed towards her, which seemed to cling to her for help, Schera with not a feeling of uneasiness smiled innocently like a child. And then, after forcibly breaking it into bite-sized pieces, she shoved the chocolate into the mouths of all the group members, and deliciously licked the melt stuck to her hands.
In front of Schera's eyes was an armory with many of the Liberation Army's equipment left behind. While slowly sending her brain nutrition, she started pondering whether or not they could do it with what they had.

—-The Kingdom's Third Army Corps, was defeated on the Alucia Plains.
Presently, they were on the retreat with the Royal Capital Liberation Army in hot pursuit. The damage was enormous, and Antigua Branch Castle had fallen.

Chapter 7: Red Apples Look More Delicious

The Kingdom Third Army Corps was being persistently pursued, and with their eyes on Branch Castle Antigua, they continued to desperately retreat. Everyone bore some form of wound, their equipment was dented, and they were totally exhausted. The soldiers that had been left behind by the main body were crushed, each and every one, or they threw down their swords and surrendered.

"Haah-, Haah-, to shamelessly, return like, like this huh. If I had to receive such disgrace, I would rather die in battle! Reform the battle formation, and throw down the gauntlet for a second decisive battle-!!"

Fumed Yalder with his breathing haggard and face flushed.
For him who had continued to walk to road to success, and soon to be 50 years old, this was the first time he had tasted failure.
The figures of both Major Generals, Kyros and Dhanush, who were leading the Heavy Infantry and Cavalry divisions, were nowhere to be seen. In the earlier engagement at the Alucia Plains, they were caught in the confusion during the explosions and died in battle.
The Liberation Army set up Princess Alucia as the vanguard to act as bait, and not only were they successful in luring in the Heavy Divisions, but also the entire army of the Kingdom to their deaths.
Sidamo had fathomed that it was a trap, but he did not possess the means to stop the enthusiastic military officers. And then, when they were just near enough that they could see the enemy's faces, the ground exploded together with the roar of the detonation. Like a chain reaction, it grew and swallowed the soldiers of the Kingdom, and many lives were atomized.
Yalder's prided heavy infantry and cavalry were simply destroyed without ever crossing swords. While raising battlecries, the Liberation Army, in the formation of an arrow, then started the charge against the Kingdom's Army that had fallen into pandemonium.
Yalder, the commander, shouted in a thundering voice and tried to rally everyone's condition, but the next move completely decided the outcome of the battle.

From a slightly elevated hill, many flags of the Empire were raised, and war drums boomed with enough force to break the sky like it would burst. Completely unexpected, the Empire's army earnestly joined the war.
The moment the cavalry unit wearing the armor of the Empire started the charge, what little fighting spirit left in the soldiers of the Kingdom was blown away. After all, the Kingdom's army was mostly a gathering of a mob of people. The soldiers who would throw away their lives and fight amounted to less than 10% probably. They were not a match for the Liberation Army who had high morale. While their numbers were overwhelmingly greater, the Kingdom Army played the disgraceful role of being routed.
The soldiers who decided to listen to Yalder's orders were no longer existing at the time. Kyros and Dhanush who were isolated had eaten a fierce attack from an elite unit carrying The Flag of the Lion, and their heads had been tragically taken.

They had only found out later, but the soldiers of the Empire that had appeared at that time were fakes–the Keyland Empire had not fully committed to the war. The

people who stood carrying the Empire's Flag were ordinary civilians, and the cavalry wearing the Empire's armor were mercenaries. Just utilizing civilians was a mundane deception tactic, but in the state of confusion from the landmines, the army of the Kingdom was thoroughly deceived. When people lose their composure, their judgement is hampered.

"Your Excellency. Let us reorganize our position at Antigua and wait for a chance to clear up this dishonor. If we were to attempt another decisive battle in our state, the outcome is clear. It is regrettable, but we have no strength to fight remaining."

At Sidamo's remonstration, Yalder looked over the soldiers around him.

"This, this, this is our glorious Third Army? So far we have fallen. Why-! I don't get it! In the first place, I haven't heard anything like the Empire would participate in the war-! What are those guys in my own country doing-!!?"

"Your Excellency, about that—-"

Two horsemen came galloping to further report bad news in the ears of the commander who clenched his fists in disgrace.

"Your Excellency General Yalder-!!"

"What is it this time!!? Have other countries taken the opportunity to make an alliance and join the war!? Those ungrateful trashes-!"

The one controlling the northern part of the Mundo Novo continent was the Yuze Kingdom. The one expanding their sphere of control from the west was the Keyland Empire.
Also, the one that united the southeast was the Dolebacks Union. The continent's southeast was originally controlled by the Kingdom, but taking advantage of the mayhem once demons appeared, every feudal lord declared independence. They would join in alliance and would form a nation, was their ploy. They held fertile land and also had access to the ocean; they had large quantities of ore resources sleeping underground, and they held great economic power. In recent years, they had been rapidly expanding their influence, leading to great wealth and military strength.
The greatest cause for the Kingdom's decline was the loss of this plentiful territory. Of course, they were desperate to take it back, and they sent out expeditions many times over.
But, the Union offered their funds and resources to the Empire and entered into a military alliance. They cooperated and opposed the Kingdom from two fronts.
Before long, the battles lengthened, and the Union which had sustained the Kingdom's continued assaults gave in, paid an indemnity of not a small sum of money, and entered into a ceasefire. Between each country, a non-aggression pact in name only was signed.
These were the series of events that led to the outbreak of the Mundo Novo Great War 200 years ago.

"Y, your Excellency, we have a Non-aggression pact with the Union—-"

At one of the civil official's utterance, Yalder shouted.

"Silence! Taking advantage of the rebels and imposing an embargo all the while, what

pact-!!? No mistake, they're snickering at our impoverishment-!"

"I, I beg your pardon."

"—-Messenger, continue the report!"

They could not believe their ears at the information that departed from the messenger's mouth at Sidamo's urging.

"Sir-! I have confirmed at the enemy's flag is waving from Antigua Branch Castle! The Rebel Army's flag is being flown! Antigua has fallen!!"

For a moment, time stopped.

"W, what did you say-!? Like something that stupid could happen!! There were 10,000 soldier left behind over there!! It's impossible that it would fall so readily-!!""

Indignant, Yalder seized the lapels of the messenger. Sidamo could also could not hide his unease at this intelligence outside his expectations.
Another messenger further continued the report.

"According to soldiers who escaped from the castle, many betrayers were incited to open the gates for the enemies who rushed in. Major General Rustam in command of defense was killed after a hard fight with the Rebel Army. Antigua has completely fallen into the hands of the enemy!"

Aiming for the gap after the enemy's main force was drawn out to the plains, a detached force attacked Antigua. The castle was opened by colluders informed beforehand. The Third Army was thoroughly pulled in by the enemy's plan, and an important base was stolen from them.
Branch Castle Antigua, a vital point of defense, from hereon would not only be the Royal Capital Liberation Army's, but would probably also become a beachhead for Empire's reinforcement units.

"Oh, ooohhh-"

"……Your Excellency. As it is, we can no longer head towards Antigua. Right away, let us withdraw from here to the Eastern Belta. We have a store of provisions over there. If we do not hurry, it will be seized by the Rebel Army."

The Belta Area was to the East of Antigua. The guards there were few due to the concentration of forces at Antigua. If they did not hurry, they would also completely lose that area around the border.

"……Nay. I, I will take back Antigua. I absolutely have to take it back. His Majesty has personally ordered me with its defense right? Besides, though our Third Army was defeated, don't we still have 30,000 in good health? If we continue our aggression day and night—-"

"We cannot, Your Excellency! Don't forget we have the Rebel Army behind us; we would be pincered with Antigua in front of us! We have to change our route immediately! We do not have the luxury to launch an offense of Antigua!! I beg of you, I beg of you, direct us to proceed east-."

Dryly croaked Sidamo with a soulless expression. He strongly shook General Yalder's body. A siege would be outrageous. They would be certainly annihilated. Chief Staff Officer Sidamo had to stop it at any cost. Even though he might lose Yalder's faith, he had to at the very least change his mind.

"—-Kuh-!"

"Your Excellency-!

"……I understand. I will go along with your words. The Third Army will change course and depart to defend Belta. We will reorganize, and then have a decisive battle again. Is this, is this okay?"

"—-Sir-, we understand. Our course has changed! Head to Belta! All troops, change course-!!"

—-Afterwards, the obstinate Liberation Army for some reason stopped pursuing. With 30,000 soldiers preserved, the Third Army succeeded in withdrawing to Belta.
Of course, the Liberation Army gained total control of the area around the border, but deciding that the defense of Belta was tougher than they hypothesized, they planned to reinforce their army at the occupied Antigua.

There was one reason why the Liberation Army could not pursue further and gain total control of Belta: Their food storehouse had been set on fire. Without food, the soldiers could not fight.
The engagement was their victory. That being said, due to unforeseen circumstances, it was a huge blow to lose 3,000 mercenaries. The Liberation Army also needed time to put their preparations in order.

The 2,500 cavalry unit spearheaded by Schera brazenly traversed around the outskirts of the enemy stronghold, Salvador Fortress. In order to escape to the Eastern Belta area, they had decided to cross Alucia River.
Just how did they succeed in passing through enemy controlled territory? The reason could be known by looking at the figures of the cavalry unit. The flag hoisted by her was the Royal Capital Liberation Army's, and they were also disguised, wearing the equipment of Liberation Army soldiers. These items had been stored in the provisions storehouse.

"I, I did not think it would go this well."

"It's a rebel army. They have deserters, Empire soldiers, and also a large group of mercenaries right? There is no way they could remember each and everyone's faces, I thought. Rather than stealthily creeping around, it would be less suspicious to be in the open."

“Vice Commander Schera is too courageous. Never could we imitate you. I can not believe you would that calmy argue with enemy soldiers. I felt the chills thinking about when you would be cut down.”

“It does help that the enemy commanders were unexpectedly stupid. Well, it is not like I cannot understand their feelings of confusion. After all, I do get irritated when hungry.”

“Vice commander, if it pleases you take this.”

One horseman riding next to her took out a green fruit from his luggage bag and passed it to Schera. It had been slightly eaten by insects, but it wasn’t rotten.

“Oh, what’s this?”

“I found it at the storehouse. It is a green apple. They are rare around these parts, so I helped myself to a couple of them. They are delicious when ripe.”

“Perfect timing. I was just feeling parched. Thank you. But to think there would be green apples.”

“They are certainly rare in the Kingdom. When one thinks of apple trees, they always have red ones.”

“I suddenly feel a craving for red ones.”

Fruit juices trickled from Schera’s mouth when she bit into it. The horseman looked delighted as he gazed at Schera engrossed in chewing, crunch, crunch.
The cavalry members had already accepted Schera, who had only temporarily taken command, as their superior officer. In the fights up until now, they felt the genuineness of her might and daring manner. ‘Isn’t she stronger than any commissioned officer of the Kingdom?’ They even had such delusions when they looked at their female commander easily swinging her large scythe.
Follow the strong, and one could live. The soldiers knew that all too well. It might even be fine to say that their hearts were entranced by that earlier incident especially.

A commissioned officer had exultantly come in pursuit from the Liberation Army stronghold, and when she had started dealing with him by feigning ignorance, all the group members present had felt a chill in their innards. She had handed over the head of the former Cavalry Commanding Officer who had died in battle. They had killed the commander, but the remnants had escaped into the woodlands, she had calmly explained. Mercenaries’ equipment were different from regular soldiers’. They were from the start more tattered, so their disguise was simple. If they took new articles from the stockpile, and suitably wore things striped from the corpses, they were the perfect mercenaries.
At first, the enemy officer had thought they were someone suspicious, but in the middle of hearing the story, ‘If we don’t hurry, they’ll get away,’ he had said, impatient for merit, and had lead his troops into the forest.
This may be obvious, but there was nothing ahead of them. All that was beyond them was Antigua Branch Castle, which had already fallen into Liberation Army hands.

“Vice Commander Schera. Bad news. Enemy soldiers are prowling around the river area. It seems that we have been spotted.”

"Oh. Well that is annoying."

"What shall we do? With their numbers, we could run them over."

Said a group member, drawing his face close and speaking into Schera's ears. She turned her gaze over yonder, trying not to act suspicious, and a force of one hundred was heading her way, possibly to check on the cavalry unit's situation.

"No other way. Let's greet them for now. If I give a signal, kill them. Skillfully avoiding conflict would be best however. It would be problematic to attract attention for no reason in this kind of place."

"Understood!"

Schera and company changed the direction of their horses and approached the platoon.
A man with a scar on his cheek, who was the only one riding a horse and seemed to be the commander, was fiercely glaring at Schera.
The platoon members turned their spears towards them and took combat positions.
They were vigilant, Schera perceived. Or probably, they had been exposed. Schera spoke up, making the first move.

"Well done fulfilling your duty-! We are the Royal Capital Liberation Army's Cavalry! We are in the middle of a march to clean up the remnants of the defeated army of the Kingdom!"

"I would like to hear your full name and exact affiliation-! This is our duty, so please forgive us!"

He spoke up in a loud voice that would not lose compared to Schera's. He would not easily be dealt with, Schera felt. He was somewhat different from the idiots up until now it seemed.

"Royal Capital Liberation Army, affiliated with the First Division, I am Second Lieutenant Schera leading the Thirteenth Cavalry Unit. I would like to ask for the same!"

"……Understood. We are the Royal Capital Liberation Army's reservists, affiliated with the First Division. I am Second Lieutenant Callus. I command a temporarily organized force."

"Understood. Well then, we are in a hurry to proceed forward, may we leave soon? The enemy will safely get away like this."

"……I have not received a message saying that a cavalry unit was in pursuit however."

"Probably a miscommunication. This happens often on a battlefield."

"Earlier, we were in charge of defense of the food storehouse. Our duty now is to search for the 'Cavalry Unit' that had raided the storehouse. It seems that they are lurking around this area."

Callus gripped the handle of his sword.
Schera was watching the situation calmly. Her scythe was carried on her back.

“I see. So, what of it? Perhaps, do you think us, that Cavalry Unit?”

The corners of Schera’s mouth raised. She poised to grab her large scythe.

“……I will ask for just one more verification. I would like you to show me your identification papers. All Liberation Army officers and men, even to the freshest of recruits, have been given them, as you should be aware. I would like you to immediately show me those. —-Immediately-!”

When Callus gave a signal with his hand, all platoon members took a stance with their spears and pointed the tips at the cavalry members.

“……Ah, that thing. Wait a moment will you? I’m sure it’s in this bag—-”

While reaching out her hand, gesturing for the bag fastened to her horse, she took hold of the large scythe on her back and slashed at Callus.
Callus had been alert and dodged by a paper thin margin.

“I knew you guys were the cavalry unit that started the fire!! Disguising yourselves as our Liberation Army, what a dirty pretense-!!”

“Your intuition is quite good. However, are you a fool I wonder. To think that you could stop us with just those numbers. Do you have a death wish?”

“Silence-! Dismount immediately, throw away your swords, and surrender! Reinforcements will soon be coming! You guys are like a rat in a trap-!”

“We refuse. After all, You’re a dead man.”

“—–!!”

Schera once again slashed with her scythe.
Callus stopped the blow with his long sword shaped like a crescent moon, but the weight of the blow made him unable to counterattack. He did not completely kill the momentum, though normally, he would have deflected the blow.

“Watch out. If you don’t carefully parry, that head will be taken from you!!”

“Th-this guy. She’s strong-!”

Callus frantically swung his sword, but his strike was handled trivially. And yet, Schera’s blows were strong enough to make both his hands numb. Little by little, the speed of his arm movements and the strength to react to the blows fell. His physical strength and willpower were being whittled down.
Schera did not overlook that.

“Die-!”

“Kuh—–”

After mixing in several feints, her cherished blade approached his neck, and the scythe cut in from the side.
After being completely toyed with, Callus took a direct hit and fell from his horse.
—-It was instant death.

“Cavalry, kill everyone!! Absolutely do not let them escape!”

“Ou-!!”

“Kill the rebels-!!”

The cavalry unit surpassed them in numbers in the first place. Within not even a few minutes, they succeeded in killing everyone.
Above all else, Schera had taken the initiative, swinging her large scythe and freely slaughtering the pawns of the Liberation Army. There had been several casualties among the cavalry unit. They had also not been seen by the approaching reinforcement forces.
If they were going to cross, now was the time.

“—-Alright, start the river crossing. Afterward, we run with everything we’ve got. Sound good?”

“Sir-! We will accompany Vice Commander Schera until the end!”

“When we get back, let us eat together. It will be my treat. In exchange, teach me more about delicious foods.”

“Sir-! Leave it to me!!”

“We’ve already been discovered, so there’s no need for the act. This is filthy with blood anyway.”

After wiping the sweat from her brow, she pointed out the armor that had been smeared with the blood of their victims.

“Yes. To think that the Liberation Army pretense would have lasted up until now.”

“Will we return to being glorious soldiers of the Kingdom?”

“Alright, raise the Kingdom’s flag! Break and throw away the Rebel Army Flag!! It’s an eyesore, so make sure to trample it!”

“Sir-!

“—-Schera’s Cavalry Unit, will now make their return!”

“Ou!!”

After crossing Alucia River, Schera’s cavalry unit had been attacked several times. It seemed as if they were discovered by scouts from the engagement earlier. The cavalry acting as the main shaft of the pursuit force had appeared.
However, everyone had been crushingly defeated by Schera as the vanguard, and she succeeded in taking the decapitated head of a commander.
The routed Liberation Army pursuit force numbered 4,000. 1,000 of them died in

action, which was a tremendous military gain, unthinkable for a unit in the middle of a retreat.

When Schera's Cavalry finally reached Berta Castle, their numbers had decreased to 2,000. However, the soldiers' faces were overflowing with fighting spirit, and they did not seem like they had just retreated. Naturally at first, since they were wearing the armor of the Liberation Army, they were being watched over.
But, because they were triumphantly hoisting the flag of the Kingdom, they did not seem to be here for a raid. When they were ushered in the opened gates, they were wholeheartedly welcomed by the guards. Morale which had fallen in Belta Castle quickly flared up, and the will to fight was more or less recovered successfully
The one most delighted at the repatriation of the cavalry unit that was thought to have been annihilated was probably General Yalder. Upon hearing the news, Yalder had let out a strange voice, had stood up from his chair, and his body had been trembling in delight. He immediately headed to where the cavalry unit was, and with tears running down his flushed face, he took the hands of everyone there.
Yalder was quick to anger, but deeply emotional, and his heart had been struck by the figure of young Schera not giving up and repatriating.
When he treated Schera as the hero of the Third Army, he was rejected in a flat voice, saying that it was too great of a reward.

—-The Kingdom's Third Army had changed course for Belta Castle and worked to maintain their sphere of influence around the border.
They numbered 40,000 including the guards and repatriated cavalry.

General Yalder, feeling responsible for their defeat, had decided to commit suicide, but he was hindered by the hands of his attendants. From the Royal Capital came a reprimanding edict, saying to wipe out their shame next time, and it was decided that Yalder would continue to lead the Third Army. There was also the consideration that even if he was dismissed, there was no one capable to succeed his duty.

Second Lieutenant Schera. She had taken over command from her superior officer who had died in battle and succeeded in setting fire to the enemy food storehouse. This was a big hindrance stopping the growing Liberation Army. Furthermore, she had broken through the enemy's encirclement and fought bravely, killing many enemy officers and men. In the end, she had allowed 2,000 cavalry to safely return to Belta Castle. This was an achievement that could not be belittled. With this meritorious deed, and the killing of Voleur earlier, and further adding on General Yalder's backing, Schera was promoted at an unprecedented speed.

Three months after being promoted to Captain, she was further given the rank of Major. At the same time, she was formally entrusted with directing the cavalry unit whose commander had died in battle.
—-A promotion to a field officer at the age of 18 was an event not seen even in the history of the Kingdom.

Schera herself feasted to her heart's content, and she seemed happy. The only unfortunate thing was that she could not savor the feeling of a full stomach for some reason.

Chapter 8: Bread Given as a Present is Probably Delicious

Yuze Kingdom Capital City, Blanca. After incurring defeat at the Alucia Engagement and the fall of Antigua Branch Castle, the generals of the First Army were conducting a debate with raised voices about their policies hereafter.

"While he was given twice their numbers in soldiers, he was done in by the insurgents I heard. What a disappointment of General Yalder!"

"The survivors of the Third Army, including guards, number 40,000. They are currently conducting recruitment from the area around Belta, but they are not making any progress. Also, as they are uneasy about provisions, a request that we send in goods and arrows has come in."

"We will not send anything. Send them directions telling them to requisition from nearby farm villages. The goods here are for the First Army defending the Royal Capital. We've sent the Third Army more provisions than they needed when we dispatched the troops!"

The exasperated Lieutenant General Barbora hit the desk. He was one of the generals affiliated with the First Army. He had firmly insisted that the subjugation of the rebel army ought to be handed over to the First Army from the very beginning. Barbora, hearing news of the Third Army's defeat, fired off harsh criticisms about Yalder repeatedly, as if he was in his own element. He had fallen behind in the race for promotions, so he was waiting for a chance, if there was an opening, to kick Yalder down a notch.

"At worst, we would have to consider abandoning the Central Border Zone. In the southeast direction is the Second Army, and in the northwest direction is the Fourth and Fifth Armies. We have no reserve to take back Antigua."

The Second Army was in charge of the defense of the Kingdom's southeast territory. Pressuring the Empire in the northwest were two Army Corps, the Fourth and Fifth Army.
A firm line of strongholds was built at the particularly dangerous northwest region to impede the main road.
The reason why serious consideration was put into the defense of the northwest was simple. Without that area, one could follow the main road straight to the Royal Capital.

"That's absolutely preposterous. The rebel army would be elated if we just up and left. The Central Border Zone with its fertile land is a vital position for the Kingdom. We should resolutely defend it to the last!"

"Still, isn't it true that we have no surplus of military might anywhere!? Just where do you plan on producing soldiers!?"

"We lack money, soldiers, and provisions. We just cain't do it! We have to report to the throne to further increase military budget!"

The senior generals with no idea of the current state of financial affairs expressed their own ideas as they pleased. They were looked coldly at by the civil officials who knew of the actual state of affairs, but they didn't notice.

"This, that, everything is General Yalder's fault for losing! We ought to call him back and court marshal him!"

Barbora strongly advocated while sending spit flying.

"I agree with Lieutenant General Barbora! It pains me, but this is to amend the disturbance in military regulations. Your Excellency Sharov, your decision!?"

They asked, turning to the opinion of the veteran army general who had been listening to everyone's opinion with both eyes closed. He was an old soldier with white hair and conspicuous wrinkles, but he still retained his tempered body. This man with a stern countenance was undoubtedly the commander of the First Army, Sharov Bazarov.
In the previous Great War, the one who had overcome the resistance of the Empire+Union after their failed campaign and turned the situation around until the ceasefire deal was signed was Sharov's great-grandfather.
Henceforth, the Bazarov House continued to produce numerous soldiers, and there were many who were promoted to high positions.
Sharov as well freely displayed his wit and was promoted to Field Marshal, the highest rank in the Kingdom's Army. Currently, he was the Royal Capital's final line of defense and carried out his duty overlooking the outskirts of the Capital City.

"……Right now, if we were to dismiss Yalder, Belta would fall. We ought to refrain from careless behavior."

"However, is it not the case that Antigua has already fallen? I do not think General Yalder could defend it anyway!"

"There is report that the enemy utilized a new weapon at the earlier engagement. There's a high possibility of the same outcome no matter who we were to have sent. We had been making light of the Rebel Army."

"You mean, the aforementioned Sorcery Landmine?"

The landmine that had been collected by Schera was sent to the Royal Capital on the spot and turned over to research groups. It was currently disarmed, possibly to find a means of replicating it through trial and error. Its structure was simple, and disarming it wasn't that difficult, reports said. The danger was just the amassed stockpile of magical power. As long as it didn't explode, it was nothing more than a normal iron barrel.

"Moreover, they were defeated, but they have not allowed the enemy to approach Belta so far. Yalder may be frivolous, but he is a brave general. His name has even circulated throughout the Central Border Zone. Because it's him, the neighboring feudal lords are still allegiant to him despite his loss. ……If we shift stations now and disrupt the chain of command, that opening will be attacked. The Rebel Army is waiting for an opportunity to devour us."

"N, nevertheless!"

"—-It would be best, I believe, for myself will see off soldiers from the Royal Capital First Army and crush the enemy together with the Third Army."

"……"

"……These may be the words of Your Excellency Field Marshal, but the matter of General Yalder has been reported to the King through Lord Prime Minister. His dismissal is only a matter of time I believe."

"Is that true!?"

Barbora asked the civil official in a wild voice.

"Sir-, there is no mistake."

Hearing the reply, Barbora chuckled. With this, one eyesore of a human would disappear. A dismissal was halfhearted. He would court-martial him, and he even wanted to drive Yalder into a corner and strip him of his rank. If fact, he wouldn't even mind if Yalder died. Rivals had to be completely crushed.

"Your Excellency. With this, it has been decided. A dismissal is too lenient. We ought to refer to military regulations and have him take proper responsibility!"

"……"

"Your Excellency Sharov!"

"Your Excellency! Your decision!"

"I will go to His Majesty, and confirm firsthand. Until then, I will reserve judgement on this case!"

Sharov strongly asserted, and the mouths of the commissioned officers that had hounded and hollered at him fell silent. After a deep sigh, Sharov left the conference room behind.

Blanca Royal Castle, Throne Room.
Passing through the middle of the lined up imperial guards, Sharov sought an audience with the King.
Sitting on the throne was the King of the Yuze Kingdom, Kristoff Yuze Unimat. He used to have a bright future ahead of him, and he had been a young man overflowing with wisdom. However, because he had been embroiled in the succession struggle that suddenly erupted, Kristoff had changed. In the middle of squirming court trickery, he had sacrificed many humans and acquired the throne.
But, he gradually stopped concerning himself with politics, and it was like he was secluding himself in the inner palace. After his beloved son passed away due to sickness, it became apparent that he was.
He idolized religion, and it was around that time that he started pouring a large amount of wealth into donations and establishing churches.
He kept the civil officials that admonished him at a distance, and sometimes confined

them, and the only ones left near him were crafty courtiers that whispered sweet nothings into his ear. This scrawny man, who was unobtrusive beside the King, could be called the first on the list of courtiers probably.

He was Prime Minister of the Kingdom, Farzam. The reason how he, at a young age of 35, acquired the highest position of civil officials was simple. This man had served near the King from a very young age, and he used that to his greatest advantage. He whispered favorable words and purged all who did not follow his ideas. He revoked their peerages, or banished them, and there was no shortage of people that he had murdered.
In the first place, it was this man who had conspired against the father of the one spearheading the Liberation Army, Princess Altura. Sharov believed that it was this man, Farzam, that was the main culprit behind the domestic conflict.

"—-Your Majesty. Myself, Sharov, have come for an audience to enquire about a matter firsthand."

Sharov kneeled and consulted the King. Prime Minister Farzan took a step forward and asked about his business.

"If it isn't His Excellency, Field Marshal Sharov. What kind of business do you have?"

"Myself would like to talk to His Majesty directly. Excuse me, but I would like the Lord Prime Minister to deter himself."

"How harsh. His Excellency, the Field Marshal, has recently onerously sealed off his heart it seems. Please take care of your yourself."

Said Farzam, making a smile and reverently lowering his head. Sharov scowled at him through narrowed eyes and returned his gaze to the King.

"—-Your Majesty. Is it true that Yalder will be dismissed?"

"……That is correct. Yalder can't win. Though, I did send that guy an encouraging letter a while ago to preserve morale. There's no meaning in even sending reinforcements if Belta falls."

By all rights, he wanted to immediately dismiss Yalder, but there was a lack of talented personnel to succeed him after. All the Major General ranks of the Third Army had died in battle. They were currently in a predicament where only staff officers were left. Until a successor could be dispatched, the role could be entrusted to no one but Yalder.

"Is there any chance you would reconsider?"

"……None. This matter has been decided."

Replied the King in a languid tone to Sharov. His face was pale, and there were shadows under his eyes. It was difficult to call the King healthy, and it seemed he was habitually neglecting his health.

"Well then, please appoint myself, Sharov, to the Third Army. The blame for losing Alucia falls on myself, Sharov, as well. I, together with Yalder, will destroy the Rebel Army without fail, I will show you."

“Your Majesty. Field Marshal Sharov is the most famous general in all of the Kingdom. There is no one but him who can be left to defend the Royal Capital. Moreover, the matter of General Yalder does not condemn the Field Marshal.”

Farzam interjected, and he advocated that only Yalder be dismissed. Sharov had to be a “Decoration” at the Royal Capital. After all, his fame could still be put to use.

“……Sharov. You are fine as you are. As for the suppression of the Rebel Army, the Fourth Army will be pulled from the northwest area and sent to Berta. The Third Army will be incorporated into the Fourth Army.”

“Then there will be insufficient protection of the northwest. I do not believe that the Empire will overlook this opportunity. It is distressing to leave only the Fifth Army defending, I believe.”

“If we quickly exterminate the Rebel Army, there will be no problems. Also, there has hitherto been no large scale military movements from the Empire. Is this not proof that they do not have no surplus either? Even if they were to move, let us say, our prided line of forts, an iron wall, will defend against them.”

Replied the Prime Minister in place of the King. In the midst of hard-pressed finances, a large amount of capital was thrown into this line of forts. ‘If we don’t use them now, when do we?’ thought the Prime Minister Farzam.

“Prime Minister Farzam. The Northwest area is an area with extremely high tension. If we move our war potential, the Empire will absolutely move. We have to contest that area. Our solid line of forts is our last line of deterrence.”

“Do you mean to say that we invested all our precious tax on a display of deterrence? Do you think we can just raise war funds from wherever?”

“They were made to not allow an offensive from the Empire. If we war with the Empire, we would spend even more money. And even more blood would be spilled probably.”

“In the first place, if we do not sent reinforcements to Belta, that would be leaving the Rebel Army to its own devices. I would like to hear just how you plan on defeating the insurgents. The Third Army is already unmanageable. I do not think such a plan is that of a Field Marshal’s.

Farzam said, grandly gesturing and attacking Sharov.

“In that case, I would like approval to move troops from the Royal Capital. The First Army would be a flying squadron. Half would be sent to the Central Border Zone. If pincered by the Third Army and reinforcements from the Royal Capital, even if the enemy does not wish to, they must divide their forces.”

At Sharov’s words, Farzam opened his eyes widely.

“To split the forces guarding the Royal Capital Blanca, I do not think you are sane. What do you plan to do if there are people plotting a revolt on homeland soil now lacking of soldiers!? —-Your Majesty. The First Army must absolutely not mobilize.”

“There is nothing else we can use to exterminate the Rebel Army besides the First

Army while simultaneously checking the Empire. 30,000 regular soldiers and all the reservists will be enough defense for the Royal Capital.”

—-A gigantic castle wall was built around the municipal of the Royal Capital Blanca, enclosing it. Around its circumference stretched a moat, and that was further wrapped around by high ramparts. To attack that would probably require considerable military forces and siege weapons. Even with those, it was certain that there would be many casualties. Many watchtowers were built around the outskirts and precise vigilance was taken.

On high group visible from the Royal Castle to the East towered Sāyeh Fortress, built during the Great War before. From this stronghold build on a natural strategic position, the the defenseless back of the Royal Capital that just invited attack could be clearly seen.

In emergencies, it would cooperate with the Royal Castle and would exhibit the greatest defense capability, or so it was surmised. If this fort were to be ignored, then a pincer attack would come from the enemy’s rear. If the enemy decided to attack the fortress with their main force, a lot of time and soldiers would be wasted. It was surely appropriate to be the Kingdom’s final fortress.

In addition, in the southern mountains was a small castle under construction, though it wasn’t as grand as Sāyeh Fortress. The Royal Castle, Sāyeh, and then this small castle would triangulate and completely protect the Royal Capital possibly.
—-Though, an enormous amount of war funds were thrown into them obviously.

“Please pardon me, but as the Prime Minister, I cannot follow your words, Field Marshal. To decrease the defense of the Royal Capital where His Majesty resides is the worst, the most inane plan!”

“……Sharov. The First Army will standby as they are. The Fourth Army will head to Belta. Upon arrival, we will replace Yalder and summon him back. ……This matter, has already been concluded. You too, expend all your energy and just harden the defense of the Royal Capital.”

“—-Your Majesty.”

“……This conversation is over. I do be slightly tired. I will return to my room. My friend, Farzam, I leave the rest to you.”

“Certainly, Your Majesty. Please enjoy your rest.”

“……”

“—-Field Marshal Sharov. Your audience is henceforth concluded. Hurry and return to your military duties. I too have government affairs, so please excuse me.”

Farzam overbearingly looked down on Sharov, took along the Imperial Guards, and withdrew from the throne room.
For a short while, Sharov continued to kneel in silence.

Half a year after losing the Alucia Engagement–Belta Castle, Sidamo's Office. Wearing glasses, Sidamo was earnestly dealing with official documents when an unreserved knock disturbed him. Sidamo raised his head from the documents, took off his glasses, and responded,

"—-Who is it?"

"This is Major Schera Zade.* I have been told you have business for me."

Schera called herself in a manner she was not yet used to. It had only been recently since she had a surname.

"Enter."

"—-Excuse me!"

Unlike before, Schera's physique was properly covered in armor. She entered the room and saluted. As one would expend, she was not holding her large scythe.

"I don't mind if you are at ease. ……However, I cannot say the same for eating. Restrain yourself in front of a superior officer. How many times do I have to say it before you get it?"

He scowled at Schera who had promptly taken out some beans after ending her salute.

"I beg your pardon."

"Make your words have some more truth to them. Make a befitting expression when you apologize. You have been promoted to Major; learn how to associate with other people."

"Sir-!"

Schera quickly chewed her beans and swallowed.

"You were away for patrol duty, so I don't know if you know this, but instructions for a large scale reshuffling has reached us."

"How, will that proceed?"

"……General Yalder has had a "sudden" drop in health, and is recuperating in the Royal Capital. It has been decided that we the Third Army will merge with the Fourth Army from the North. In short, we will have a change in leadership at the same time reinforcements arrive."

"……sir."

General Yalder had been extremely boisterous and lively up until yesterday. Yalder,

who had received a directive from the Royal Capital, found it hard to bear with his anger and disgrace and raged loudly. The Lord's room of the castle was in terrible disarray, and it was as if the enemy had raided it. He had finally realized that the letter of encouragement sent from the Kingdom after the defeat was just simple consolation. For his Third Army that he had nurtured to be completely swallowed up, for him as a commander, was like having his own child stolen.

'At least he could feel relief for not having been demoted,' Schera thought. To be honest, she didn't really care, so whatever.

That General Yalder adored Schera like she was his own grandchild, and even had her succeed the family name of Major General Jira who was killed in battle. Yalder, who had thought it would be a shame for Jira's lineage with no successor to come to an end, had the bright idea of having the brave, young warrior be the successor. Sidamo was at his wits' end at having more extraneous work again. In the first place, Jira Zade just didn't have a successor; there were still healthy relatives. He had ran into difficulties as expected, but after continuing to tenaciously negotiate, he had gotten their consent. Once he had played his final card, the gold that Yalder had prepared, the Zade relatives, understanding the situation, had made a complete about-face in attitude. The territory of the Zade family had already been forfeited, and their family name was now nothing more than an honorary position. Money-in-hand before honor in this era.

(I know that all too well. But, there are things that must not be cast aside.)

While ridiculing himself for being manipulated by his family name, Sidamo had finished his succession chore. Schera had no means of knowing it was that troublesome of a matter. To have a surname that she didn't even care about pushed onto her, the person in question had made an extremely annoyed expression. When he remembered all his hardships negotiating, Sidamo wanted to slap her, but if she seriously retaliated, he would be the one to die probably, so Sidamo beared with it.

"……I will continue to fulfill my duty as a staff officer. I've lost my rank as Chief Staff Officer though. You too. Continue to devote yourself for the Kingdom."

"Understood."

"And, I don't doubt that you are a great soldier, but I have some doubts left about your command of soldiers. Accordingly, I have decided that I will assign two adjutants to assist you in commanding."

"Adjutants?"

"Correct. They themselves aspire to join your unit. There were positions for Platoon Leader open, but they rejected that.They are excellent people who have learned military strategy from the Kingdom's military academy. I have no doubt that they surpass you in leadership, tactics, and ingenuity."

Sidamo did not forget to add some satire towards Schera at the same time he professed the excellence of the adjutants. I want her to have some sense of responsibility, thought Sidamo.

"Yes, indeed. I think so too."

Even though she was indirectly called an idiot, Schera did not mind at all. Sidamo furrowed his brow, looking at her face that basically said, 'I don't mind; I'm happy as long as I can eat.'

"Your cavalry unit has become the most famous and elite here at Belta. So that you do not defile that reputation, make good use of the adjutants. Accept their counsel freely and serve the Kingdom more and more."

"Understood."

Schera's attention had started wandering because Sidamo had continued to layer statement upon statement on her. It took everything she had just to squeeze out the word, 'Understood.'

"Never again as a single horseman chase the enemy around. Same with prattling 'Power Reconnaissance,' and then leading the cavalry unit into enemy controlled territory. If you idiotically fight and get killed, everyone's morale will be affected. That is what it means to be 'Elite.' I will not allow you to go off dying on your own. Do you understand?"

"Of course."

—-Of course she didn't understand.
If, right in front of her eyes, the enemy's food was being sluggishly transported, of course she would immediately attack it. She got her hands on provisions, and her stomach was full. It was a completely good thing. Though, after this happened several times, the enemy had attached rigorous guard to their food supply train. It had given her merit, so there was no problem.
—-Was Schera's understanding.

"……Do you really understand? Have you been listening to me with that head of yours? If you wholly understand, then acknowledge it."

Sidamo trained his eyes that told of unquestionable doubt at Schera. His assessment of Schera was, 'She has quite an arm, but her head is inversely just as bad.' General Yalder, soon be former General Yalder, thought so too.
A staff officer needed much grit to deal with those guys skillfully. Sidamo, who could not handle them, had his Chief Staff Officer rank taken from him. Hereafter, the Fourth Army would have hegemony, and it would be accurate to say that his road to success from hereon had been cut. Sidamo's heart was gloomy, but he had not given up yet. Until his family was restored, he would never give up.

"I, Major Schera, Completely Understand!"

"I will put the adjutants under your supervision later on. I have already talked to them about the future beforehand, so there should be no problems. ……This concludes our business. You may retire."

Mentally fatigued, Sidamo quickly returned to his work. A different kind of fatigue set in than when Yalder was his conversation partner. If he talked with Death any further, he would probably be brought to his now deceased older brother. Or otherwise, maybe he would go mad like his older sister.

"Sir-, I, Major Schera, will return to my duties!"

Schera, who had stood at attention partaking in the long conversation, seemed giddy compared to before.
But, perhaps relieved that she no longer had to put up with formalities, she let out a large sigh after leaving the room. And, "Ahh- I'm tired," she said in a stupidly loud voice while at it.

—-That moment, some blunt-sounding thing was thrown at the office door.
As the door was durable, there was not a single crack.

Unfortunately perhaps, stress had accumulated in the former Chief Staff Officer, and he had thrown a flower vase. He was surely hungry, no doubt about it. Schera sympathized with him.

"……As I thought, the head doesn't work well and dulls when hungry it seems."

Schera took out a piece of bread from the bag she was carrying, left it in front of the office door, and took her leave. It was like feeding an animal, or leaving an offering for the deceased.
It goes without saying that upon discovering the bread, Sidamo's irritation surged up even stronger.

—- The Kingdom's Third Army in Belta Castle and the Royal Capital Liberation Army in Antigua Branch Castle had fallen into a mutual stalemate. Schera's cavalry, once again 3000, were deployed, and making the best of their mobility, their main duty became patrol and subjugating nearby foes.
Which was the case, but she sometimes took independent action, conducted a Power Reconnaissance, and raided the Liberation Army's supply trains. By all rights, this was a breach of military regulations, but as she made great military gains every time, her transgressions were invalidated. The Liberation Army was tormented by this guerrilla warfare that was more distressing than predicted, and inevitably, the guards of the supply trains were reinforced.

It was around this time that the name of Schera was starting to be known by the Liberation Army.

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*Schera's name is a reference to Scheherazade from One Thousand and One Nights

Chapter 9: Grass is Also Occasionally Delicious

Inside Belta Castle; In front of Sidamo's Office.
Two newcomers only just appointed were standing stock still wonder what to do. More specifically, they were wondering what to do about the object in front of their eyes.

"……What is this I wonder?"

"No matter what angle you look at it, isn't it bread?"

"What I'm asking is why is there a piece of bread placed all the way out here. ……I wonder if this is some test for us. We better think this through."

Muttered a woman wearing a brand new officer uniform as she pushed up her glasses. That was her way of dealing with stressful situations probably.
The other man squatted and gazed at the bread. Nothing special, just a loaf of bread. Nothing more, nothing less.
—-In other words,

"Someone probably just dropped it. You're thinking too much."

"All the way over here? Just who the heck would?"

"Anyways, let's pick it up. It may perhaps be Sir Staff Officer's. I'll hold it unnaturally and maybe he'll notice it."

"……Do as you please. Just don't get me involved."

After showing an incredulous expression, the young woman knocked on the door. A man's sharp voice replied from inside.

"—-Who is it?"

She took a deep breath and raised her voice.

"Sir- I am Second Lieutenant Katarina Nubes assigned to the Third Army this day! I have come to make my introduction!"

"Similarly, I am Second Lieutenant Vander Hafiz!"

"Enter."

"Excuse us!"

Hearing the short reply, they straightened their backs so as to not be discourteous and entered the room. Inside was a man carrying out his official duties with many creases between his brow.
The two newcomers guessed that this was probably the Chief Staff Officer of the Third Army, Sidamo Arte. In any situation, first impressions were crucial. They straightened their backs even more, clicked their heels, and saluted just as they practiced many

times before.
—-When they unintentionally looked down, there were pieces of a broken flower pot around the floor.

“You’ve done well to come to Belta Castle, the front lines of the Yuze Kingdom. From here on, I expect great work from you gentlemen, is what I want to say but.

Sidamo cut off his sentence.

“……?”

“Before long, it has been decided that we will be assimilated into the Fourth Army. You guys being in the Third Army, unfortunately, will only be for a short while. ……That aside, what’s that in your hand?”

He pointed at the bread Vander was holding. His brow furrowed again, and an eyebrow was twitching and spasming.

“Sir-, this was left in from of the door, so I had thought to pick it up. Is this possibly Staff–”

“Wrong. ……Dispose of it as you see fit. It’s something the Sir Hero dropped. If you’re hungry, I don’t mind if you eat it. After the conversation is over that is.

“S, sir.”

Katarina and Vander both exchanged dubious expressions. But Sidamo disregarded that and continued.

“……Returning to the original conversation; as I said earlier, immediately once the Fourth Army arrives, we will merge with them. Most likely, we will be put in charge of support.”

They would work behind the scenes and be unable to accrue spectacular achievements. There was no question that they might even have extremely burdensome tasks shoved onto them. Use the resources of others, not one’s own, obviously.

“And so, what about being stationed with Major Schera’s unit……?”

Katarina timidly asked. The was the greatest chance to work beside a future Hero. She didn’t want to let this opportunity escape. Vander on the other hand, was thinking that nothing could be done about it.

“There’s no problem. As arranged, you will be enlisted as an adjutant. It would probably behoove you to take some food and greet Major Schera afterwards. She’ll then seriously listen to you for certain.

“Understood.”

Hearing the word food, a question mark floated above Katarina’s head, but she didn’t dare to venture the question. It seemed like there was some connection to the bread earlier, but this wasn’t the mood to ask it.

"……About Major Schera who will become your superior officer, she's a somewhat troublesome being. She likes to act arbitrarily on her own authority, she has superficial experience commanding a unit, and she is not well-informed of the art of war. However, she is valiant and is the owner of many kills."

Sidamo expressed with words not flowery at all. There was no point in lying, so he indifferently only conveyed the truth.

"H, however. She was promoted to Major at the tender age of 18. This is of an unprecedented speed even in our army I believe so…"

When Vander enquired, Sidamo solemnly nodded.

"Indeed. She volunteered during recruitment at 16, and on that occasion, she passed since she had brought heads of the Rebel Army. After a surprise attack blunder in her first battle, in the middle of a rout she annihilated an enemy platoon and was promoted to Second Lieutenant. She slipped amongst deserters from Antigua, infiltrated the enemy's spy base, and killed a Colonel of the Empire's Army."

"A, Amazing."

Katarina involuntarily commended. This was a career exactly befitting a Hero. If she kept it up, a promotion to General was probably not a dream. She would witness that progress from as close as possible.She aspired to be an adjutant for that sake.

"Moreover, at the Alucia Engagement, she lead a cavalry whose commander had died in battle, destroyed the enemy's food storehouse, and after all that, broke through the enemy's encirclement and repatriated. She is the owner of such feats. If we had 100 of her, there would be no doubt to our victory."

"Then, why do you consider there to be a problem?"

"Schera excels in combat certainly. But, she has received no training as a military officer. Her knowledge is meager; she leads based on instinct; all she has superior power. For a single soldier, that's great, but I have a great deal of insecurities entrusting her with the lives of 3,000 cavalry. At the same time you assist her, I would like you to restrain her recklessness."

"So what you're saying is…"

"Think of it like this. She completely falls into an enemy trap; you keep her from being killed no matter what it takes. Don't let her fall into the same rut as we the Third Army, is what I'm saying.. ——How about it. Do you understand? If you understand then say so."

Finished with his almost self-demeaning speech, Sidamo urged both of them who had been bombarded with words.

"Und, Understood. I will aid with everything I have."

"Same. I, Vander, will devote everything!"

Katarina and Vander, despite being barraged with words, saluted and expressed their comprehension. For some reason, they felt like they had some extremely difficult work

pushed onto them.

Just a little bit, Sidamo made a relieved expression.

"……Very well. In that case, you may retire. I expect achievements hereon."

"Sir-!"

The two adjutants respectfully withdrew and exchanged mutual glances.
Like they were wondering what just happened.

"For the time being, let's greet Major Schera. We won't understand anything if we don't meet her in person. Consideration can be left for later wouldn't you say?"

"Y, yeah. As you say. We ought to take action instead of being anxious. ……No, we definitely can't act without thinking this through. Absolutely not. What's done cannot be undone—-"

Katarina muttered to herself and pushed up her glasses. 'Again with this?' thought Vander as he walked forward.

"What are you whispering to yourself for. I'm leaving you being."

"Hol, Hold it right there!"

"Don't talk so loudly. People will hear you."

"It's because you're leaving!"

Since she was aware, Katarina did not have parents, and she was a prodigy who through great effort and study struggled this far. She liked learning more than fighting, and if pressed to say, she disliked those humans who acted without thinking. Her unusual foster parents were also humans who acted before thinking.
After adjusting her slipping glasses, Katarina chased after her colleague in a jog.

Belta Castle, Inside the Stables.
The two started a conversation with the soldier briskly taking care of the battle horses.
Perhaps Katarina was tired of walking; her body was sluggish.

"……Where's Major Schera?"

"She led the cavalry and set out on her task some time ago. I think she's taking the opportunity while patrolling the perimeter to go for a raid on the supply trains as usual."

"B, but, Staff Officer Sidamo told her to put an end to that."

"Hahaha, you're telling me. Please tell that directly to Major Schera. Well, if she would stop just by being told to, I think the Staff Officer wouldn't be having such a hard time."

The soldier laughed and returned to caring for the horses again. He was also one of Schera's cavalry unit. Maybe because he had seen his commander's strength firsthand, his morale was relatively high. Seeing that the soldier had returned to his work, Vander lightly sighed.

"I can't help but feel like there's trouble in store for us. Maybe it was a mistake to volunteer."

"……Oh shut up. Even if you're thinking it, don't say it."

"It's just my personality to say what I think.:

"Hurry up and fix that."

"I'll exert myself, Lord Second Lieutenant Katarina."

Upon coming to visit Schera's office, they found it vacant, so they searched around inside Belta Castle. They finally heard a trace of her in the barracks, and hurried to the stables as they were told.
However, they were just one step behind, and only mentioning that she was heading out to patrol the area, Schera had led 100 cavalrymen out of Belta.
—-Schera had completely forgotten about the new adjutant matter it seemed.

Around that time in a different place.
Schera had, as arranged, traveled west of Belta at full speed, and after they crossed Alucia River, they were lying prone on a slightly elevated hill overlooking Antigua Branch Castle. Naturally, they had dismounted, and their horses were hidden in the shade of the trees.

"Let me see… I wonder what became of what was once our home, Antigua. ……What an eyesore of a flag as always. That annoying, shit-green flag. I get more and more irritated looking at it. I think I'm going to get wrinkles on my brow just like Staff Officer Sidamo."

Schera took at look at the castle through the eyepiece stolen from the Empire intelligence operatives while prone.
The Yuze Royal Family's coat of arms on a green background–it was the Liberation Army's flag. The Royal Family's coat of arms on a red background then would be the Kingdom Army's.
Schera violently teared a handful of weeds that were around her, threw them into her mouth, and masticated like a horse. Bitter. Unpleasant. Pungent. 'I shouldn't have eaten this,' she immediately repented.
With a look so atrocious that one would find it hard to approach her, Schera looked through the eyepiece and checked the current state of affairs. The inside of the castle was calm it seemed, but it did not seem the security was loose at all. The town inside of the ramparts was crowded with people like soldiers or merchants, and smiling faces could be seen on the coming and going townspeople. Half a year had passed, and tranquility had been completely restored. Actually, maybe it was prospering even

more than those days under the Kingdom. There was the delight of having been liberated from tyrannical rule possibly. Schera, displeased, spit out the grass.

"……Major. No one eats weeds after getting irritated."

A soldier on alert in the back addressed Schera, feeling amazed.

"I've left them with the horses. So I don't have anything on hand right now. My stomach is in crisis."

"Please be at ease. Take this. I procured it some time ago."

He crawled up to beside Schera and with a smile handed over something. In the middle of passing through Alucia Plains, he had harvested some plants from a field. As this was already enemy territory, he unhesitatingly helped himself to just one.

"……What's this I wonder. It seems more chewy than that grass I ate."

"It is a plant that is the raw material for sugar. Cut the stalk and hold it in your mouth please. It is sweet and tasty you know."

As the soldier said, when she cut it and held it in her mouth, juice containing a sugary taste seeped out. Schera gave a whole-faced smile and bit at it.

"It's sweet and tasty. This is a great achievement for you. I'll bestow upon you something nice after we get back."

"Thank you very much."

"Let's see, my stomach, enemy castle's defense is solid–I guess next, shall we go search for food like always? They've come from so far, carrying all that all the way out here for us. We have to be grateful."

She turned the eyepiece from the castle to Alucia Plains, starting to search for supply trains laden with goods.

"Even so, we have continued to repeat the raids over and over again, so why have we not been intercepted even once?"

"In a meaningless place like this, maybe they just don't have the leisure for guards. It seems they're trying to concentrate their manpower around Belta after all. But shouldn't something like attaching guards to supply trains be done to the best of their ability? —-Oh, I've discovered this evening's meal. How's their defence I wonder."

Schera discovered a column of carriages in the distance. She could see that the guards were lacking. In that case, there would be no problem. The instant she decided to to take action, she felt a strong bloodthirst. She quickly turned the eyepiece in that direction.

"Major? What is the matter?"

"……It seems our companions were unexpectedly free. Or I wonder if we've overdone it. Here, you take a look too."

She said, and spontaneously threw the eyepiece to the soldier next to her. He panicked, and after he had gotten a hold of it, he looked towards the direction Schera pointed out.
……Violent dust clouds were being whirled up. It was a cavalry unit hoisting the Liberation Army's Flag, and moreover, the Flag of the Lion. Their numbers were about 100 maybe. They were coming towards the hill that Schera and group were on. They were advancing quite quickly in addition.

"They are clearly making a course towards us. Major, have we been discovered do you think?"

He enquired while returning the eyepiece to Schera. He wasn't panicking because he had faith that they would get away.

"Those guys probably were also looking at us with this thing too. Earlier, I made eye-contact with someone who looked like the commander."

Schera slowly stood up, vigorously stretched, and headed to where the soldiers were hiding. Would they inflict a blow, or would they meekly dismiss themselves. Schera though while holding the stalk in her mouth.

"What will we do?"

"—-Let's see. Our numbers are about the same, so I'll just go greet them a bit. You guys stay dismounted and lay in ambush. Make sure to prepare the longspears. If our guests come, we'll give them a resolute reception."

"A single horseman in any circumstances is too dangerous! If you are going to go, we will go with you!"

"If the unit suffers injury, Staff Officer is going to decrease my wages again. It'll just be a quick greeting, so you don't have to worry about anything."

Schera put on her helmet, jumped on her beloved brown horse, and prepared her large scythe. Her brown hair that could not completely be concealed peeked out of her helmet. 'Maybe it's about time I cut it,' Schera inconsequentially thought while she lightly swung her scythe. The created ominous sounding roars and growls reverberated through the surroundings.
The group members reflexively sucked in their breaths. They were really glad that that scythe would not be swung at them. Schera kicked the horse's abdomen, and it started racing towards the approaching Flag of the Lion with all its energy.

Displaying the Flag of the Lion, this force had discovered Schera. They were assigned the arduous duty of guarding the supply train because it had been harshly tormented by successive raids. Like starved wolves, the enemy cavalry corps had decisively assaulted them. To have this elite unit put to use as guards proved how loathsome Schera and group were thought to be. The Liberation Army's kitchen was also not in a comfortable position, and they had no surplus to donate to the enemy army.

"Lieutenant Colonel Fynn. At this distance, they will be able to escape probably."

The young man called Fynn lightly nodded when a female adjutant with horse running in line addressed him.
At a glance, he was a man of delicate features, but he owned a considerable arm and had killed two enemy Major Generals at the previous engagement. In that surprise fighting way before, the man who annihilated Jira's division was also this man. He was conferred a lion insignia, and he was the strongest warrior in the Liberation Army. This young man's name was Fynn Kattef. He would later be hailed as 'The Lion General.'

"Even still, that is not a problem would you not say? Our duty is to protect the supply train until the end after all."

"Good grief. The Death God thing from the rumors is actually an extreme thorn in the side. Even we were called for escort duty."

"A gigantic monster that wields a large scythe, right? If that is real, I somewhat do not want to meet it. Well, as far as I can tell, it was nothing more than a rumor."

When Fynn checked with the eyepiece again from atop his horse, the human silhouette from earlier had vanished. If she was a real god of death, she would not be doing things like stealthily creeping around right. A rumor after all was nothing more than a rumor. The fear in one person disseminated, and then was amplified–that was the reality behind the Death God. Just as we was reassuring himself of that—-

"Horseman of unknown affiliation is coming down towards us! ……Armor of the Kingdom's Army, and holding a great scythe in hand!!"

A soldier retreating from the vanguard said in a loud voice. When Fynn hastily focused his eyes in front, certainly, there was a horseman running down with frightful momentum.

"……Hey, it's just a single horseman. She planning on surrendering?"

"She's postured for battle. It does not seem like a surrender."

He considered a surrender, but as she was holding an uncanny, large scythe in her hands, it did not seem that was her intention. It didn't appear to be a desertion either.

"A rush with a single horseman? Preposterous! Drag her off her horse and expose the true nature of the pitiful grim reaper!"

The female adjutant harshly yelled, and with an enthusiastic cheer, three horsemen touted their spears and charged.

"Sir-! Leave it to us-!!"
"I'll make her rust on my spear!!"
"I'll give her a suitable reward for making light of us!!"

These were zealous, young cavalrymen with faith in their arm and very high morale. The small figured horseman and the horsemen from the Liberation Army crossed weapons. In a second, the head of the first rider was sent flying. A remaining

horseman unleashed furious attacks determined to harm his foe. His coordinated attacks were easily handled. He was knocked off his horse by the scythe handle, and Death's beloved horse crushed his body with all its weight.
The last man deeming that this enemy was beyond him, turn his horse around and ran several steps, whereupon he abruptly lurched and tumbled down. A crude, small sickle used to cut grass protruded from the young man's brain. Schera thrown it essentially like a boomerang, and had reaped the life of her prey. She had aimed for the small gap between armor and helmet and had successfully hit it.

"I-it's the grim reaper. The god of death from the rumors."
"……R-really unpleasant."
"Not only that, she's just a young girl. Th, that's a disguise no doubt."

The brave cavalrymen unintentionally sounded tense. They were men of valor, but they were superstitious. That was the symbol of Death who cruelly harvested souls. At that figure construed as the embodiment of Death, they reflexively felt fear.

"You guys, how can you even call yourselves the cavalry that carries The Flag of the Lion!? What's there to fear about a single rider!! Know some shame-!!"

"H-however"

A calm voice interrupted the distressed horseman.

"Just a bit, I will be the one to verify this."

"—-Eh?"

When Fynn muttered that, he drew his bow from his back with smooth moments, and mightily drew the bow and arrow to its limit. The arrow that was fully drawn back by his tremendous strength roared as it flew towards Schera.

"——tsk!!"

As the arrow was many times faster than Schera had predicted, she awkwardly parried it with her scythe barely. With no pause, arrows were rapidly fired. She waved her scythe and warded them off, but just one arrow stabbed into her shoulder armor. Schera clicked her tongue, pulled out the arrow, and then turned her horse around and started climbing the hill.

"It seems arrows will strike even Death. If that's the case, even we can probably win. She seems to be human like us."

"Lieutenant Colonel Fynn, let us chase her immediately! This is the best opportunity to pay back everything up until now! For the sake of our killed comrades as well, please pursuit-!!"

"……No. I have somewhat a bad premonition. We will turn back here. We have accomplished our mission of defending the supply train. I don't think it's good to push ourselves further. More importantly, we have to recover their corpses."

"Lieutenant Colonel-!"

"Also, for a single horseman to have come, I can only think that she was luring us.

There are surely troops waiting in ambush. To tragically die in combat, ambushed, I refuse. Come now, don't frown. Let's hurry back. Your pretty face will be spoiled."

"……Understood."

Seeing the adjutant biting her lip, he involuntarily made a sarcastic laugh. That moment, he felt a strong bloodthirst, and Fynn's countenance changed.

"——!! Milla, dodge-!"

"Wha-!!"

Before his Adjutant, Milla, could respond, Fynn promptly rammed into her horse and pushed it away. Having been unexpectedly crashed into, she was emphatically blown off her horse.
A thrown, small sickle flew by where Milla was just now. It was aimed such that it would have probably torn her neck. What unparalleled accuracy. If she hadn't been pushed away, there would have been a fountain of blood, no doubt about it.
Looking from far away, Schera resignedly shook her head sideways. Afterwards, the corners of her mouth twisted and she looked down at Fynn and his group. Then, after provoking them by running her thumb across her own neck, she slowly return to atop the hill. The cavalrymen had forgotten about pursuit and were stock still in surprise.

"……The nickname of Death God is not just for show, I guess."

Having protected the life of his important adjutant, Fynn annoyingly looked at the retreating figuring while sighing. Probably, that petite figured girl would take the lives of some hundred brethren from now on, or so he feared. That appearance of calmly resting a large scythe on her shoulder was nothing but that of Death itself.

Chapter 10: An Extravagant Meal is Considerably Delicious

When Schera led her troops back to Belta, they were met with cheers of joy from the castle soldiers.These were the cavalry unit members tasked with house-sitting, and they were eagerly awaiting the return of their superior officer.

“Thank you for the reception. I’ve returned. I pushed myself too hard, and I feel like I’m about to faint.”

Schera jauntily crossed the bridge and entered the castle while holding the stalk in her mouth. After everyone had entered the castle, the drawbridge was once again raised for defense.

“Welcome back Major Schera! How were today’s affairs?”

“We were hindered by a certain Lion. Their guard had become quite strict it seems, as one would expect.”

She recalled the unit carrying the Flag of the Lion that had gotten in her way. That young man who had fired sharp arrows at her. As she prioritized deflecting arrows that would inflict fatal wounds, she was unable to deal with one arrow. Luckily, she was uninjured, and it was just her armor that broke. When she had thrown a small sickle that she carried on her as payback, it was just barely avoided. He had true strength, good intuition, and he also wasn’t drawn into the ambush.
It appeared the Flag of the Lions was not for mere show. They were truly a troublesome enemy. She bit the stalk that had lost its taste in two, crushed it, and then swallowed.

“That is because Major Schera rampaged too much. Come, a meal has been prepared for you!”

Responded the soldier who raised his hand, directing her to the barracks.

“Thanks. Aah, before that: I have to get brand new armor. The shoulder part here is broken. You go first please.”

“Major, I definitely think you ought to get that treated, how about it?”

The anxious cavalryman was worried about Schera. He was the soldier who had presented her the sweet plant at the raid earlier. When Schera remembered that, she grabbed a small pouch from her waist.

“I’m fine. There are no injuries to my body. That aside, thanks for the food earlier. Use this and eat something you like.”

She took out a shiny gold coin. Forget a meal, one could eat as much as they liked for a week. At such excessive remuneration, the cavalryman was disturbed.

“U, under no circumstances. This is too much for me to take.”

"If you have a complaint, then go together with other soldiers. Unused money is meaningless."

"But."

"Fine. If you so vehemently refuse, I'll throw it away."

"W, wait please!"

When she gestured to throw it, the cavalryman hastily held out both hands. She threw it, and the cavalryman grasped the gold coin.

"Thank you very much, Major Schera!"

"Nothing of it."

Giving the saluting soldier a backward glance, Schera hurried forward still atop her horse. She was so hungry that she was certain she would faint. No matter how much she ate and ate, her stomach would become empty again before long. Despite that, she did not gain weight. Just where did all the nutrition she ate go?
Schera didn't know. When this did start happening? Maybe after that time when she ate that grim reaper thing? This was probably her just-desserts for giving in to her greed that one time. However, Schera thought this was more preferable to those times when she felt like she would die of starvation. She may not be able to savor the feeling of a full stomach, but she could abate the feeling of hunger.
Schera, presently, was very satisfied. She had become renown before she knew it, her stomach was a little more full, and she could have a meal together with her comrades. With just those, Schera was content. Other matters were unimportant.

She handed over her horse, and in the middle of heading towards the barracks, Schera was stopped by a voice calling to her.

"What's the matter?"

"Sir, I have heard that Major Schera is looking for new armor. By all means, please use this! It is quite a gem."

One cavalryman who was on house-watching duty presented a brand new armor to Schera. It was armor dyed jet-black. On the shoulders were carved white birds.

"What extremely nice appearance. The quality also looks very good. Where'd this come from?"

When asked, the soldier pushed out his chest and responded while hitting the armor with his hand, *kon kon*.

"Sir- I earnestly requested a civilian blacksmith employed by the military to make this. He was very hesitant at first, but when I told him you would be using it, his attitude took a complete about face. I think this armor is appropriate for the Major who is a match for thousands!"

"……Thanks. I'll treat you to a meal sometime. Anyway, can I immediately try it on? I hope the size is good."

“H, here. you mean?”

“What, is there a problem I wonder?”

“N, no. I will assist you!”

The damaged armor was thrown away, and Schera was actively putting on the new armor. ‘What’s going on, what’s going on?’ Curious onlookers around the area started to gathering, seeing as their fabled, honored Major was innocently changing in her underwear.
What was unfortunate was that she had not a shred of sex appeal. She had no curves to speak of. Her countenance was also bad. After quickly putting on the armor, the soldier in the spur of the moment even attached a bright red cape. Schera tucked her hair behind her ears, and then brandished her large scythe, carrying out various attack forms. She was testing out if the armor would get in the way or not.
The babbling soldiers reflexively gulped. Their superior officer slowly held the scythe over her head, and then cut the air, and the corners of her mouth curved. They, at that appearance, were lost for words in fear and awe.

“……No problem it seems. I’ll pay the the blacksmith compensation afterwards. I’m going to eat now, so if something comes up, come after I’m finished.”

A meal was more important than armor it seemed, and Schera left at a brisk pace. The soldiers around her that were watching, all of them, stood at attention and saluted.

“S-sir-! Understood, Major Schera! It looks great on you, really!”

“……?”

Schera had a dubious expression, but she silently left. The group members left behind exchanged glances and let out a deep sigh.
—-’I’m really glad I’m not her enemy,’ they thought.

Barracks Dining Room.
Schera was silently devouring bread, steak, corn soup, and vegetables.
The fragrant smells stimulated her appetite. She thoroughly chewed and slowly ate while relishing the taste. She was able to eat tasty food today as well. When she was eating, a smile would naturally leak out.
—-But then, boorish words were thrown at her.

“Excuse us for disturbing you during your meal! We are—-”

These two people who were standing still in front of Schera’s desk since a while ago, with limbs going numb, addressed Schera.
Of course they were aware that interrupting a meal was discourteous. But, significant time had already passed, and this illustrious superior officer had not even given them so much as a glance. Deciding that she wouldn’t mind if it was just something like a

greeting, they dared to speak up.

Immediately, a loud, thunk noise was made, and Schera with narrowed eyes and no longer smiling was radiating bloodlust. The knife that was in her hand stuck out, deeply embedded, from the table.
The thing Schera hated the most, was to be interrupted while eating and slowly enjoying the taste.
In times like this, she would chew in supreme bliss to her heart's content all the portions she excited in the middle of battle was unable to eat. To have this interrupted was akin to dashing water suddenly over her.
Just like the previous time when the military police interrogating her was about to be murdered, Schera's aggression swelled many times higher than normal. This could not be described in any other way except as a flaw, but she herself had absolutely no intention of amending this it seemed.

"—-Silence. Can't you see I'm eating? If you don't want to be knocked out, then mute yourselves over there. If you insist on doing something else, I won't stop you, so do as you please."

"……P. please excuse me."

"……"

Schera once again started happily chewing. Only sounds of silverware moving remained at the dining table. Completely tense, the two of them had their hearts in their mouths. They did not want to tread on the tail of a starving tiger again.
—-Her meal would be finished… one hour after this.

"……Pardon the wait. So, what business do you have I wonder?"

Schera wiped her mouth with a napkin, gave thanks for the food, and turned her focus towards the soldiers. The two people standing rigid over there straightened themselves, saluted, and named themselves again.

"We were appointed this day to be adjutants for Major Schera. I am Second Lieutenant Katarina!"

"Similarly, I am Second Lieutenant Vander!"

"Ahh, you're the guys Staff Officer Sidamo mentioned. I heard you've come to take over command in my stead. Let us cordially work together from hereon."

Schera stood up and calmly saluted. Her stature was shorter than theirs', but it appeared like the motivations they carried were different. In actuality, the two adjutants were somewhat overawed.

"N-not at all. The commander is you, Major Schera. We on the other hand will aid you to the bitter end."

Katarina flusteredly corrected, but Schera shook her head sideways.

"I have not received any formal officer training. All I can do is swing my scythe to

live. I have hope in you two. I leave the cavalrymen in your hands."

"We will devote everything we have!"

"Very well. Then, I will return to my room so. If anything comes up, I won't mind if you come. Except for when I'm eating, anytime is fine."

"Understood!"

After dazedly seeing off Schera, who left while humming, they both spontaneous looked at each other, and agreed that they had a problematic superior officer.

"……Quite outside the norm for heroes I guess. I… know another person a lot like her."

"My view towards heroes is different, so no need to go into detail."

"Even if you begged, I wouldn't."

"Well that's a relief. Still, she's a lot different from what I imagined. I thought she would be more, how do I put it…"

Vander crossed his arms, turned his back to the chair, and sat down. It seemed he was worn out from standing so long.

"……However, I think the rumors are true. I really thought I was going to get killed."

"From a conversation I heard earlier, apparently she half killed a military police officer. It seems that's somehow true too… It was probably punishment for interrupting the Major's dignified meal."

"However, as an ally, there's no one more reliable."

Katarina pushed up her glasses and immersed herself in thinking about this very interesting state of affairs. To be able to bear witness to a hero from up close was her dream.
Vander shook his head, and feeling shocked, muttered, 'I can't keep up.'

—-Next day
The Fourth Army commander General David who had finally arrived immediately assembled the commissioned officers.
Separated into many units, the reinforcing soldiers number 40,000. Together with the residuals of the Third Army, they were 80,000 in total.
The soldiers dispersed to and were stationed at each fortress in a radius around Belta.

General David was impatient for merit, deciding to eliminate the Rebel Army by any means necessary. David was a contender to be the next Field Marshal, but he was losing to the brave and celebrated Yalder, and this would be his greatest chance to

turn things around. If he obtained the achievement of destroying the Rebel Army, it would not be an exaggeration to say the cat was in the bag.
En route to Belta, he had dropped by the Royal Capital, where Field Marshal Sharov had strictly ordered him to "absolutely do not let them cross Alucia River."
But like he would preoccupy himself with that. The one entrusted with command of strategy was him, David. He was born of high class nobility with ties to the family lineage that established the royal family. His connection to the current King was also deep.
For someone of such high pride like him, it was exceedingly aggravating to be ordered around by a normal class upstart like the Bazarov family.

"Gentlemen, I am David, the commander of the Fourth Army. Now that I am here, there's no longer need for worry. We will immediately execute the rebels, and I promise you that victory and stability will be bought about here in the Central Border Zone."

"I am honored to meet you for the first time, Your Excellency David. I am Sidamo, the Chief Staff Officer of the Third Army. I have compiled all the reports about the Rebel Army and notices about the reorganization plan for your perusal."

David took a glance at the documents Sidamo handed over, and with a simple, "unnecessary," he threw them away.

"I don't need compiled information from a defeated Staff Officer. You guys have sullied the history of the glorious Kingdom. How dare you unabashedly live on. Do you not know the meaning of shame?"

Sidamo lowered his head at David's abuse. The civil officials on standby nearby also looked down on him in disdain. They had been gathered as persons of good lineage, and they could aptly be thought of as David's clique.

"……Pardon me."

"What Chief Staff Officer. It would be better if you were a miserable food manager. The Staff Officers of our Fourth Army can think of strategy. You go think about tomorrow's food menu."

"Really, that you could even show that face of at this assembly. You have no pride it seems."

"After all, he came from a fallen nobility. All he has ever known is shame."

At one Staff Officer's denunciation, the other commissioned officers unanimously voiced their agreement. For someone of humble birth to obtain achievement was irritating and unbearable. Yalder may have been frivolous, but he did not discriminate based only on pedigree. Sidamo's shoulders shook in humiliation.

Sounds that broke the mood spread through the room. It was crunching, like something was being broken. The one making the noise was Schera. Tentatively a field officer, Schera while unwilling was participating in this war council. Because of the sudden convening of the war council, Schera had missed out on eating breakfast and was immensely vexed.
The room fell silent, wondering what that was, but as Schera had quickly chewed and

swallowed, no one was any the wiser.
A giant man next to her gave her a fleeting glimpse, but she was playing dumb: she absolutely didn't know what happened.

"……Well whatever. The clean up of the Third Army, Staff Officer Sidamo, you will do it. If you work well, maybe you won't be completely useless."

"Sir- I will devote everything."

"—-Hmph. By the way, where's the respected hero that's become common talk recently. Hasn't he played a very active role in the cowardly Third Army? Dunno if that's true or false though."

When David viewed the faces of the commissioned officers, he stopped at one point, on a small-statured girl wearing conspicuous black armor, on the seat of that imbalanced person.

"Is it you? The officer given the alias of Death God by the enemy?"

"Sir-, I do not know about Death God, but I am Major Schera."

When Schera gave a salute, snarky laughs could be heard from the surroundings. After stroking his own beard, David gave a deep sigh.

"……It seems Yalder has also surprisingly gone senile. To even be able to bow his head to one showing such an unsightly, shameful sight. Moreover, to exercise his own political influence and allow someone of such humble birth to succeed the name of nobility. Rank of Major she says? The army isn't a children's playground."

"Jesus. He also bent over and got done in by the Rebel Army. What kind of leadership is this?"

"—-Affirmative. As it is, his Steel Division thing was also after all a decoration wouldn't you say? To be demolished by one blow, they were nothing more than plain papier mache. Mere show."

"To forcibly make this lass out to be a hero was probably to raise morale maybe. Kukuh-, is not this actually a tear-jerking endeavour?

In an amazed manner, they collectively ridiculed Schera. Sniggers and scorns were included, and if it was a veteran with pride, he probably would have been indignant. However, the one actually the target of ridicule did not mind at all.

"……In the next battle, if you don't accrue appropriate merit, I will strip you of your rank. It gives me the chills to think a layman little girl like you would stand shoulder to shoulder with us high-prided nobility. I want to instantly drop you to Private by all rights."

"—-Sir-, I, Major Schera, understand."

With a unpleasant 'Hmph' from his nose, David continued in addition.

"This will probably be the last time you will be able to speak with me. Jeez, what a truly absurd story. That fool Yalder."

“Your Excellency David. it is about time—-”

David’s adjutant warned. David’s schedule was completely packed. After the war council, he had a business meeting with the influential men of Belta. Furthermore, a welcome ceremony was held for him. To make his own power known, and to solidify Belta’s strongholds, industrious work was necessary. There was absolutely no time to worry about stray dogs.

“Ahh, that’s enough. Just the commanders of the Third Army, you all leave. We will decide what happens next. At the most, you guys should just sharpen our swords.”

Waving them away, David urged them to leave with hate from the very depths of his heart shown on his face.
A commissioned officer oh so helpfully opened the door to the council room and beckoned with his head. Hurry up and leave, he was implying. The members of the Third Army, helplessly trickled out. People who had lost their chief were after all just treated like this. No one said a single word of complaint, and with heavy footsteps, they reflected on their own misfortune.

—-Though, only Schera was full of smiles, and with light footsteps, she cut in front of the leader and left.
Finally that shitty talk was over, and she could finally get her long-awaited, delectable meal. It was inconceivable that she would complain.

Barracks Dining Hall.
Schera in good humor was having breakfast. Next to her was Adjutant Katarina. She was silently eating. Together with her superior officer, and slowly. Vander had headed out to check on the training of the cavalry unit.
After the meal was finally over, Schera let out a huge exhale. Thanks to the stupidly long talk, her mood wasn’t quite good.

“Have you finished with your meal sir?”

“Yeah. It was really good. I can still eat more, but that’s enough for today.”

Just how much do you want to eat? Katarina furrowed her brows. Her glasses then slid a bit, and she hurriedly fixed it with a finger.

“……How was the war council? It seems you left midway through though.”

“Ahh, the bearded idiot told us to. If we don’t play an active role next time, he said something like I’ll drop to a Private.”

“Ma-Major! If someone else heard you, you could be put in jail for defamation of a superior officer! He’s the highest commander here at Belta.”

She covered her mouth with her hand, and gestured to lower their volumes. But the voice of that very person was the loudest.

“If I get put in, then it’s fine if I just break out. Right?”

“Please put in effort to avoid that in the first place!”

“I guess. You’re correct. Well do you best then, Second Lieutenant Katarina.”

Schera smiled and patted her shoulder, and then stood up and left with a, ‘farewell.’ Left behind her was an adjutant who let out an even deeper exhale than her superior officer.

Chapter 11: Absinthe Is to Die for Delicious

Around when a grand welcome event for "His Excellency David The Next Field Marshal" was being held in Castle Belta's VIP room:
Schera together with her cavalrymen were attending to a duty of sheer utmost importance assigned in the name of Belta's highest emissaries–The ruinous crest of the Third Army's flag that invited utter defeat for the Kingdom. All of them would be disposed of and replaced with the Fourth Army's glorious banner… that kind of supreme order.
In simpler terms, it was ~~a present~~ harassment from the Fourth Army to Schera. According to the esteemed officer, "You guys are fit for these kinds of odd jobs." This kind of treatment was enforced not only on Schera but also on all the other persons. There was no way mixing the stranger soldiers that came from the northern area and the soldiers that had defended Belta and Antigua would turn out well. They mutually hated each other, and fighting broke out in many places over the most pointless to speak of disputes. Thus, even when they were unfastening the unneeded flags, boos and insults could be heard nearby. Seeing the flags of the Third Army stacked like a mountain, Vander offhandedly complained.

"……Should I have been an artisan, a flag weaver?… I am definitely folding flags."

He took the flag off the pole, and then replaced it with the new one. He was sick of it that he would collapse.

"Move your hands, not your mouth. There are still some hundreds more as you can see."

"Yeah… Roughly 1,000 I guess?"

"Ahh-, I'm hungry. How healthy to be under such a bright, glorious sun. Anyone have a nice boxed lunch?"

"There are none, Major. Though I think where His Excellency General David is has some. Luxurious food piled high like a mountain that is. They are surely having a staggering feast you know."

"Second Lieutenant Vander, mind going over there and getting me some?"

"Please excuse me, but I cannot follow that order. I personally do not want to go to jail, and I cannot escape like you can Major."

When Vander joked around, Katarina threw the battleflag that she was holding at him.

"Hey, didn't I tell you to move those hands? We won't finish by today at this rate!"

"Yeah yeah. I understand, Oh Magnificent Second Lieutenant Katarina. ……Major, we will do the rest. A commanding officer doing such menial tasks concerns our dignity."

"As he says Major Schera. There is no need for Major to do these kinds of things!"

Katarina raised her voice. This was not work for a hero. However, Schera indifferently

continued working.

"I don't know what dignity you mean, but go feed that to the dogs. I have spare time so I don't mind. Besides, look. Those guys of my unit are doing something interesting."

Where Schera pointed, a crowd of soldiers with special paint were making a commotion for some reason. It seemed they were repainting the Third Army's flag. A soldier who seemed to have some artistic skill was holding a brush and carefully moving his hand.

"……What the heck are those guys doing over there? It does appear that they are writing something but."

When Vander concentrated his eyes, they had finished painting it pitch black it seemed. They had turned it into a suitable flag for Schera.

"They said they're putting scrapped materials to effective use. Thinking that it's trash anyway so no one will care, I gave them permission. They can still be used, and it would be a waste."

"……If they behave willfully like that, they are going to be scolded again. They are already being glared at it seems."

Warned Katarina, but Schera had not the ears for it.

"I don't really care. If it's just being glared at, nothing will actually happen."

Muttering that she didn't care, Schera continued her work. The many cavalry group members, deeming that it was perfect, cheered in joy. They fastened it to a pole and triumphantly waved it around. An emblem of a white bird was drawn flying on a black background.

"……What do you think that is? A bird, right?"

"A white crow I was told. He said that in his birthplace, it's a sacred bird that governs life and death, and he thought it was appropriate for me and really wanted to make it. It appears to have turned out surprisingly well."

"Does such a crow really exist?"

"If there is, I want to try eating one. What kind of taste does it have I wonder."

A white crow was also known as a lucky omen for people. Naturally, it doesn't actually exist. The soldiers, associating Schera's person with Death, thought it was a suitable coat of arms. As Schera's name would spread, this flag would take on special meaning. Just spotting it would make the confronting person quake in fear. Just holding it would make one's blood boil and no longer fear death.
All because these men, filled with anticipation, working on their own accord for the sake of their overawing superior officer.

"Still, is a black flag not unpleasant? And not only that, arbitrarily making a flag with a coat of arms is something to be court-martialed for."

“That won’t happen since I’ve pretty much become a noble. It’ll be fine if I just say it’s the Zade family’s new insignia. Well, if it still becomes troublesome, let’s just say we don’t know anything about it. …….More importantly, isn’t there anything to eat?”

“—-Ah, I have hard candy. Would you like some?”

Katarina took out a small bottle from inside her pocket. It seemed she carried it for her superior officer’s sake. She thought hand candy would be somewhat more agreeable than eating bread in the middle of an important conversation. According to what Katarina heard, the rumor went that Schera had been eating beans at the war council before. Katarina, who had guessing that this wasn’t a rumor but more like actual truth, had given up validating it. Of course she didn’t want to ask something like, “Did you eat beans during the war council?”

“Thank you very much. I’ll have some.”

“Please.”

Not stopping to care at all about the soldiers who rushed up to her, she began tasting the hard candy Katarina handed out. It was just sweet and had no particular taste. Withstanding the urge to bite down, she thoroughly enjoyed the sweetness with her tongue.

“We’ve done it, Major Schera! What do you think about this coat of arms!?”

“Ah, yeah. Pretty good I wonder. Very fantastic.”

“Thank you very much! We will make this the flag of our unit, Schera’s Cavalry!”

“Sure sure. Pretty good I wonder. Great thinking.”

To the soldier who asked with excitement if the flag for Schera’s unit was good or not, Schera suitably nodded and consented. She didn’t care for the flag. There was no problem since it distinguished between friend and foe. But that she was thinking that was unknown to the man. His face blushed in delight because he was praised by his dauntless, daring, and dashing commander. He flourished the flag overhead, almost flaunting it. The white crow flew while being shined on by the sunlight. Satisfied before long, he turned around 180 degrees and faced his comrades.
And then, “We’ll paint all the flags over here!” With that dreadful statement, he once again started setting about his work. He had probably been gradually painted by his commander’s personality.

“……Their morale is quite high. There is a remarkable difference when compared to the soldiers of other units. I think their confidence in you is more than enough proof.”

Katarina said, and pushed up the tips of her glasses. This wasn’t flattery or sycophancy. Actually, just try listening to their conversation: “Schera congratulated me! You may think I’m exaggerating, but I saw it with my own eyes!” he said loudly.

“We’ve been together for such a long time haven’t we? Ever since Antigua fell I think. Their commander person also lost and died in one-on-one combat.”

All the people who’ve been above her have for the most part died or met with misfortune, Schera casually thought. Maybe that would mean that Yalder, who hadn’t

died, would be reasonably happy. For a moment, Schera thought that maybe she was a harbinger of sorrow, but conversely, there were people that she had saved too, so she adjusted her thinking.
Bearing the omen that governed life and death, Schera gazed at the white bird carved onto the black armor she was wearing. She wasn't particularly thinking anything. Oh yeah, she hadn't had bird meat in a while.

"……I heard that Major Schera had taken temporary command after that. You struck down the enemy commander and completed your mission. The cavalrymen had proudly talked about it you know. They say you commanded like a veteran commissioned officer."

"Even I think it was strange. Faster than I could think, my mouth and body moved on their own. Well, we survived and were able to eat food again; that's definitely something to be ecstatic about. Most of them were also able to make it back."

Schera bit the hard candy. Yep, she couldn't resist. She couldn't stand it, and completely pulverized it with her molars.
She thought about taking one more, but it seemed the flow of the conversation wasn't appropriate. Schera resisted, and she continued to listen to their talk. She persevered, but the figure of a white, rounded food floated in her mind. She had probably associated this with bird meat earlier.

"There is probably no need for our aid. Actual combat experience is a hundred times more useful that empty theory after all."

"Certainly. It is said, one experience over a hundred pieces of knowledge."

Agreed Katarina at Vander's remark. They had experience in bandit subjugation, but they had not the experience of participating in actual combat. They certainly had come to be knowledgeable, but whether or not they could capitalise on it would depend on their decisions on the battlefield. That would mean that Schera had enough aptitude as a commander, they thought.
A simple fool should not have been able to survive.
—-But, thought Katarina,
What if that fool possessed enough prowess to blow such trifles out of the water?
Possibly…
I absolutely want to see how Schera fights in the coming battle, soon, with my very own eyes, Katarina thought. Dauntlessness enough to be called Death; what a sight it would be. She turned to look at Schera, but her hands had stopped, and she was staring into space listlessly.

"—-That aside. I kinda want to eat an egg. A boiled one."

Uttered Schera randomly out of nowhere.

"w-what?"

"Major, Schera?"

"You know, an egg! Immediate food is far more important than desk theory. All I learned in actual fighting is that lots of food is needed for battle. —-And therefore, I leave the rest to you two. I have to return to my own work so."

‘Good,’ said Schera as she stood up and hastily walked to the barracks. The two bewildered followed after her, where they discovered Schera happily peeling an egg.

The Kingdom’s Army and the Royal Capital Liberation Army were contesting for possession over dominion of the Central Border Zone. Why this location was valued that much was apparent if one could see the continent map. The Yuze Kingdom’s controlled territory divided the continent from the Northwest to the Southeast. To the West was the Keyland Empire, and to the eastern area was the Dolebacks Union. The Central Border Zone was the sole area of the Kingdom’s territory that bordered the other two countries. Of course, many people passed through here, and naturally, it was prosperous. Commerce was blooming. It was currently under the embargo, but that did nothing to check the flow of people. If people were coming and going, then obviously goods would also flow–just now it would be called smuggling.

Furthermore, it possessed wide plains and Alucia River as a source of water, and the earth was fertile. One could expect a harvest of crops from the warm climate, and it was even possible to transport goods on the water using the river. As a matter of course, the towns in this region prospered and were highly populated. The regions the Empire and Union controlled as well. In this area where the borders of the three countries practically touched existed a metropolis that was the very heart of the Mundo Novo continent.
It had the Holy Land of the Three Star Order, the main faith of the continent (and current divided due to a factional strife),
and Academic City Arte, which held the Labyrinth known as the Demons’ nesting place. It had once been called Labyrinth City Arte.
It was a neutral metropolis that belonged to no country, but it was defended domestically and foreignly by armed forces to protect against invasions of the Order. If the Order called to arms, it was assured that adherents in every country would take up arms.
In this era, that was all that was protecting their neutrality, their temporary peace.

In the northern region of the Central Border Zone, which could expect a great deal of profit, the rebel army had risen up to seize those vested interests. The Kingdom would in no way overlook this. The Empire was clearly meddling, and consequently, the Kingdom sought to crush the rebels in their early stages.
The result was that they had suffered a devastating loss with the fall of Antigua, a cornerstone of the southern Border Zone.
Currently, the situation was of Salvador and Antigua in the west confronting Belta in the east with Alucia River in-between them. Losing Belta here would mean forfeiting their sphere of control in the Central Border Zone, and in concert, the road to the Royal Capital area would be wide open. This had to be prevented at all costs.
Therefore, Sharov, the Field Marshal of the Kingdom’s Army, had strictly ordered to not let the rebels cross Alucia River. Though the Liberation Army’s forces may be growing, there was a limit to how much they could support. If they devoted themselves to protecting Alucia River, it would be sufficiently possible to preserve the front, Sharov had judged. And then supposing if they sought to exterminate the Rebel Army, Sharov thought to muster the First Army, and pincer the Rebel army from the

North and East with a gigantic force.
—-Though unfortunately, that plan was rejected.

If this plan had been adopted, the Liberation Army would certainly have been put in a crisis.
Despite them being the Liberation Army, they also took into consideration that they did not want to be in anymore debt to the Empire's Army, who they were receiving aid from. The Liberation Army had not risen up to expand the Empire's dominion. They had risen up to overthrow the current monarchy.

Incidentally, it was simple why the Union in the South had not moved. They were merely observing the situation, transporting goods, and earning money. There was no need to intervene and expressly lose military power. Moreover, this nation was made of a miscellany of small groups of cities, and thus it took an abnormal amount of time to make any decision. A head was elected via election, but every time a decision needed to be made, it would be majority rule after many, many civil meetings that would drag on forever.
In this status quo where they had completely become independent from the Kingdom, all the town heads were in agreement, recognizing that an expansion policy beyond this point was futile. Everyone understood that, in a situation where they acquired new land, there would be mass chaos over who would govern it. The strife would be more violent than the other two countries, and the amount of blood shed would be nothing to scoff at. Hence, they would not war. It would cost money, people would die, and when cities fell to ruin, it would not be profitable at all.
The extent to which other countries fought was of absolutely no concern. They would celebrate, selling weapons and property. Commerce over war. Their trade partners were the Empire, and then the Royal Capital Liberation Army. For their bitter enemy, the Kingdom, a trade embargo to bring it to ruin.
Then for smuggling, they would beat down prices and buy cheap, and force a sale and sell high. Abundant gold and goods were the strongest weapon. That was the Union's current course of action.

Report from Armed Spy.

—-Regarding each country's movements.

-Yuze Kingdom: Reinforcements from the northwest to the Central Border Zone. General Yalder reshuffled. New inaugurated is General David.
-Dolebacks Union: Maintaining observation. No signs of military mobilization.
-Keyland Empire: In the process of concentrating forces in the northwest.

—-Matters of special mention.
-Regarding General David. Regarding the reinforced army.
-Concerning the "Death God," rumored in the Liberation Army forces.
-Report from colluders. Dividing the enemy in progress. Regarding acquired goods.
Endlessly spelled out a detailed report bearing confidential information.
After a quick, flip-through glance, he thanked the spy for his hard work.

"……Well done. Please continue your work."

"Sir-."

“Make sure to not get noticed by the Empire’s spies. It would be disastrous if the Empire finds out.”

“As I have been informed. Please leave it to me.”

The Liberation Army’s Tactician, Diener, pondered while gazing at the report. The spy had already departed from the room. Diener had invested his own private property and trained competent people of skill. There were also skilled Rangers pulled from the Labyrinth City.

His independently organized Armed Intelligence Unit was secret to even Altura, let alone the Liberation Army fellows. They conducted themselves like normal soldiers, but they were like actors who did not show their true face. Single handedly bearing the dirty work was the Tactician’s job. In order to keep his Princess pure, someone had to do it.
The materials necessary for uprising–who would collect them? Where would they be gathered from? Where did all the resources for the growing Liberation Army come from? Did the Empire so easily support them goods every time?
—-Nay. The effects of the bad harvest had also hit the Empire, and not enough of necessary goods were supplied to them.
There would be no support from the Union in the first place. The Liberation Army’s finances were originally dire.
Then, where did they procure goods from? Why hadn’t they gone bankrupt? The answer was simple. They would fairly “collect” from certain places. In enemy territory within reach, there were many “storehouses” just waiting to be collected from, “unguarded,” and “completely abandoned.” All the infamy would be shouldered by the Kingdom’s Army. Actually, the Kingdom had done this too, so no one was any the wiser.
The realization of a dream required necessary compensation.
Altura did not need to know. If she did not stay pure, the people would not follow. It was this virgin, heroic figure that the people, all the men who had given up, would see as the most brilliant white.
Altura had said that she was resolute. In that case, he would have her serve as the symbol of the Royal Capital Liberation Army until the very end.
Diener had decided. For her ideals, he would perform any and all deeds, and take all the impurity unto himself.

(……But, still not enough. There are too few determined people. Another push is necessary.”

He closed his eyes and began polishing his plan for hereafter. His colleagues in the Liberation Army had to do it on their own, otherwise it was no use. They would win their right to live with their own hands. Their spirit was still lacking. They had the capacity, and he had prepared the means for it. All that was left was fuel to last them till the end. For this hell-like Kingdom to change its present condition, it had to be once burnt to the ground.
An incompetent King. Soldiers only for self-protection. Government officials lining their own pockets. Nobility living in endless luxuriously through citizens’ money. Taxes increasing in severity. Rising war spending. The withering populace. The starving and dying weak. Oil was necessary to to set the Royal Capital violently ablaze. An evil liquid, viscous like dark mud was.
That was what ought to be called “Devil in a Bottle,”* and it would surely ignite the

souls of the people into an intense flame.

Sacrifice one to save a hundred. Whether this was correct or incorrect, the future would probably know. If they won, tens of thousands of lives would be saved under Altura.

(A Messiah that liberates from severe oppression, or a diabolic rebel army. —-Just which one will we become?)

He asked to no one in particular. If he executed this plan, that would be a stamping a brand which could not be erased. Did he have the readiness for it? Did he have the heart to accomplish it? Diener slowly opened his eyes, and he burned the report which could not be allowed to exist in the flame of the candle.

—-There was no turning back. In that case, he would determinedly march forward only. Even if he were to run his body into the ground.

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* Absinthe is an alcoholic drink also known as Devil in a Bottle. The Japanese call it something like, Devil’s Liquor.

Chapter 12: Stuffed Lamb Intestine is For Some Reason Delicious

General David, upon finishing work incorporating the Third Army into the Fourth Army, immediately began formulating a plan to recapture Antigua. Supressing the Rebel Army was a matter of utmost important for David. His forces were sufficient. Goods were in abundance as transportation had been completed. If they were to attack, there was no other time except now. Moreover, harvest season was soon approaching. Before the crops senselessly went over to the Rebel Army, he wanted to hurry up and reclaim them. Recapturing Altura Plains was more urgent than their tight financial situation.
In the conference room blazing under the early summer heat, the Staff Officers of the Fourth Army were clamorously and noisily arguing. In order for their own opinions to be approved, for the sake of catching the eye of the commander, they were frantic in their own right.

"—-When one's forces are greater, a frontal attack is the yellow brick road. A cowardly battle is ill-befitting of His Excellency."

"That's what Yalder said, and he was defeated. We ought to clearly work out a plan here."

"What is vital is in what way do we cross Alucia River. There is danger associated with a large army crossing such a wide expanse. We will be attacked by the enemy is what I'm saying. On the other hand, Belta and Antigua are linked by this bridge. But crossing Sulawesi Grand Bridge also has its dangers."

He pointed to a site on the map. There was an important point of traffic, where hustle and bustle could be seen, and where peddlers traversed everyday. Currently, as the Kingdom and Liberation Army were glaring at one another, there were nearly no merchants using it. It would cost money, but their safety was guaranteed: they utilized ferries.

"It is unreasonable to make use of that bridge. At best, only around one company could cross at a time. They'll be beset by the waiting enemy and beaten the instant they've crossed.

"Then how about forcibly crossing the river? We'll push through in one stroke. A few sacrifices are unavoidable right. A battle can't be fought fearing death. We'll muster all the Fourth Army and cross in a moment. We've been repeatedly training for this."

He boldly spread the knight pieces on the map towards Alucia Plains. Strength in numbers, that was his central dogma.
With a "Hmph," another Staff Officer took a piece symbolizing the Liberation Army and whacked it over there. The Kingdom's Army piece shot off from atop the map.

"Like our opponent would just watch while we cross the river. How about you go back to military academy and go study again. What the heck are you thinking? I really want to have a peek at what's inside that upbeat head of yours. This is no different from Yalder."

He vilified, and it was almost like he couldn't stand it.

"Strength in numbers. After that is only God's guidance and luck more or less. What we consider is in what way before the battle starts can we prepare a force that exceeds the enemy. And, we have been increasing the number of soldiers. If that's the case, we should make a confident attack. I cannot see the need to think of some clever ruse. It's pointless."

This man was recently appointed to Staff Officer. He was originally an ex-military officer, and what fate would have it that he would be in this place. He clearly possessed thought and character not suited towards a staff officer.
"There is a need to hear other opinions." At this one line from the corps commander, everything was settled. He was a staff officer in name only and was basically a personal bodyguard. He was obstinate, but he had a mean sword-arm. The Chief Staff Officer of the Fourth Army had to consent, thinking that this was David's intention.

"Spare me the tedious talk. What a staff officer should consider is how to minimize damages, or how to guide the unit to victory. That's all there is. In that aspect, we cross wit instead of swords. Your thinking is that of a military officer and is inappropriate for a staff officer. Don't make that mistake again. —-Anyway, a forced river crossing is not possible, Your Excellency. If they aim for us when our formation is disturbed and our marching speed has fallen, we will fall easy prey."

After hammering down the nail that was the ex-military officer Staff Officer, he informed David that the contrived river crossing was inadvisable. David was sorting documents while sitting in his seat and drinking water at the same time. The respectable bodyguard-cum-Staff Officer did not agree with that manner.

"I see. What an interesting exchange of opinions. It was gratifying to be able to see the difference in thinking between a military officer and a civil officer. Truly a sight. ……Then, how about we combine the two opinions?"

David elatedly smiled, and the staff officers exchanged glances.

"—-So, what Sir is saying is?"

"We will use the strategy that those guys used. When we feign attack, we defend. We make them think we won't, we do. We feign numbers, but it'll be the opposite. Wasn't this the fundamental tactic learned in military academy? Are you gentlemen so busy that you've forgotten?"

David placed a piece at Sulawesi Grand Bridge on the map, and then another piece was moved to a spot where the width of Alucia River was relatively narrow. Then, he ran them to Antigua Branch Castle.

"….I see. So the unit on the bridge is a decoy. No problem in that case. As expected of you, Your Excellency David. I am in awe of your wisdom."

"This is a very effective plan I believe. Those guys will strengthen their formation on the riverside. And then in the long run, Antigua will be completely vulnerable."

"If they tighten their defences of Antigua on the other hand, we can leisurely cross the river."

Flattered the Staff Officer, and the other people were also exaggeratedly nodding.

“Still, how would we cross? Siege weapons are needed to make Antigua fall right? Also, a supply train is needed to maintain a large army. There is no way we can cross just like that.”

The bodyguard-cum-Staff Officer idly played with a wagon shaped piece. Siege weapons, rams, siege-use ladders, and catapults were currently being prepared. They were lacking those for capturing Antigua. As it was, it would be difficult to ferry them over the river.

“Regarding the siege-use weapons, they are currently being assembled at that very location. Of course, the construction soldiers have been mobilized. Regarding the method for crossing the river, we can just use pontoon bridges. We’ve brought them all the way here just for that purpose.”

The Chief Staff Officer placed small blocks of wood on the denoted river crossing site. Small boats would be lined up and tied together, making an instant bridge on top. Durability was a problem, but it would be fine if they would last until the crossing was done.

“…..I see. In that case, it seems this plan will go well.”

The bodyguard finally nodded in consent. When the Chief Staff Officer though about how he would have to give the same explanation to the commissioned officers, he became almost nauseous. But, this amount of hardship was nothing much for the sake of his own fame. If he worked hard, he would be transferred to a do-nothing job like the staff officers of the Third Army.

He put his feelings in order, stood up, and said summarized the contents of conference.

“First, we dispatch troops to Sulawesi Grand Bridge, draw out the enemy main force, and nail them down. Late at night and at the same time, we dispatch the construction unit, we build a pontoon bridge at the river crossing site. At dawn, we start the march. The cavalry unit as the First Division will cross the river, trample, and pulverize the enemy guards. The Second Division of infantry will build a beachhead and march towards Antigua. The Third Division will be the main shaft of supply trains, siege weapons, and worker soldiers. —-Is this all sir?”

David nodded, and the other staff officers showed agreement in succession.

“—-Umu. The Sulawesi Grand Bridge diversion unit will cover the riverside with battle flags like a shroud. Then, they will show the enemy often that they intent to advance. ……No, perhaps just that won’t be enough. I will also take battle formation near the Grand Bridge. If the flag of the Army Corps’s commander is raised, that will add an additional layer of believability.”

Informed David, and the staff officers exchanged glances. Though it was a diversion, that did not change the fact that it was a dangerous place.

“Your, Your Excellency, will you also depart for the front? A diversion unit though it may be, it is accompanied by danger.”

"Of course. Those worthy of nobility must display their authority and stand at the vanguard of the masses. If the commander fears, the soldiers do not follow. That is war. Just as he said earlier, we cannot behave cowardly."

David asserted. It was hard to reconcile pride as a noble with life. As a military person, he would devote himself to the Kingdom and moreover attain the highest distinction. That was David's aspiration.

"Your Excellency's honest resolution is splendid. All of us here vow further loyalty."

"I expect great work from you all too."

"Sir-, please leave it to us."

"We will absolutely bring Your Excellency victory."

In order to guarantee David's safety, the Chief Staff Officer started to further supplement the plan. The commander being killed was the worst possible scenario.

"Judging from the enemy's main force, for starters, it is difficult to think that they would throw caution to the wind and cross the river. However, in the off chance that they come to cross the bridge, I believe we should surround all of them and exterminate them. If they try and forcible cross the river, we will meet them at the riverbank. We will also call for reinforcements from Belta at that time. These are further considerations, so there is a need to deploy more than 10,000 to Sulawesi Grand Bridge."

"The elite of the Army Corps would have to be deployed along with His Excellency's elite guards. We need to assure perfection."

"If they follow under the direction of His Excellency David, wouldn't there not be any problems?"

The deployment of the Army Corps's most elite infantry–they would pretend to be 30,000 strong via handcrafted dummy soldiers, which were straw effigies made to wear armor and to hold battle flags. They were substitute soldiers to make the enemy think that they were reinforcements. They would tie down the enemy main force, and they played the most important role in this battle. The commander's leadership would be tested.

"Umu. For example, if the enemy main force were to change course, we would cross the bridge and strike their backs depending on my decision. The enemy soldiers will probably be annihilated, pincered by us and the unit crossing the river. There is no doubt in our victory wouldn't you say?"

David reassuringly nodded. The operation had been decided. —-Operation Alucia Crossing.
This would no doubt be left behind in the Kingdom's annals. It would probably be a brilliant military record about David. The road to rising to Field Marshal was assuredly wide-open. David unintentionally leaked a smile for his own glorious future.

First Division: Advance cavalry unit. 10,000.
Second Division: Fourth Army mixed infantry division. 50,000.
Third Division: Supply train & construction soldiers. 3,000.

Sulawesi Grand Bridge Troop Headquarters: 15,000 of the most elite.
Left behind for defense of Belta: 50,000 of the former Third Army, on standby and prepared for battle.

With around 80,000 soldiers pumped in, David's all-in, crossing operation was about to unfold.

—-Conference room. Commissioned officers who would lead the troops gathered. Duties for the operation in the near future were being assigned, and stations were instructed.

"……Major Schera. Your unit will have 1,000 men. Rear guard of the First Division is your duty. Your mission is to not get in our way. Earnestly devote yourself to lookout. Don't even think about excessive things. If you try to steal a march on us, I will absolutely punish you. Drive this into your skull!"

From the cavalry that was assigned 3,000, 2,000 were reshuffled into another unit. Even so, to be able to lead a unit could probably be said to be fortunate. If there was another field officer who could lead cavalry, Schera would have been discarded at the onset. Forget David, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that all the leaders of the Fourth Army Corps loathed her. That she would be demoted to a private had impressively circulated, and there was no shortage of passing snickers.

"Sir-, I will devote everything I have!"

"Hmph, you'll probably be just a common soldier the next time we meet. How truly annoying."

Contemptibly spewed out Major General Alexei, who would lead the First Division, and the surrounding men laughed.
Though, the people who were once the Third Army kept silent, knowing the validity of Schera's prowess. It would be unbearable to say something excessive and be demoted. Hence, they didn't speak. The mouth is the cause of all calamity after all.

"Get it? Training cavalry takes an extraordinary amount of time and money. By all rights, a young girl like you would never have been entrusted with even a single rider. Take that fact, thoroughly drive it into your incompetent head, and really understand it.. Absolutely do not waste troops. Soundly abide by my instructions. Absolutely do not get in the way of other units. If I judge that you cannot do even that, I will immediately execute you. Got it?"

Pronounced Major General Alexei. This was not a threat. When he heard at first that this little girl was a field officer and was also leading 3,000 cavalry, he had forgotten to be angry and was dumbfounded. It's because of things like this that the Third Army was defeated. He didn't even want to give her 1,000, but he couldn't otherwise. Even just forcibly assigning 2,000 to other cavalry units had affected command

enough that he wanted to avoid anymore confusion before the start of the operation. Therefore, she was assigned a duty, rear guard of the First Division, that anyone could do.
As soon as this operation was over, he planned on petitioning for her demotion. He didn't want to see her face. That someone had prepared even a grandiose nickname, Death God, Alexei thought that ludicrous.

"I, Major Schera, completely understand!"

"Then dismissed. The talk after this is not for you. Just go feed the horses. Get used to it, because after the operation is over, you'll be doing that everyday."

"Sir-!"

Sniggers enveloped the conference room. Schera alone left the room together with stares of disdain. After listening to such a trivial talk, she was extremely hungry. Let's hurry up and fill my stomach while feeding the horses.
Thought Schera while whistling. At the barracks cafeteria, she casually purveyed some vegetables and quickly headed to the stables. She threw fodder into the horses' feeding trays and gave her own horse carrots.

"I'll go with this ……What is this do you think?" She asked her brown horse, but, it intently chewed the carrots without even a glance towards her.
She hadn't expected a response, so Schera was talking to herself while stuffing her cheeks.

"Stuffed lamb intestine. Sausage. How did something like that become something this good I wonder. Food truly is mysterious wouldn't you say?"

While gorging herself with the overflowing meat juices, Schera was enjoying the modest meal with her loved horse.

"Horses have it nice. They can survive off of grass and water. I'm really envious."

Just once, the horse looked in her direction. With a small neigh, it began taking carrots into its mouth again.
Schera sat down on the stable's floor and lightly sighed. Again, a fight would start. She should probably fill her stomach while she could in this interlude, since after they sortied, there would possibly be more dried food. She wasn't particularly dissatisfied, but she was more or less tired of it. Well, dried food wasn't bad in and of themselves probably. It was fine as long as she could eat. That was more important than anything

When she returned to her office, two adjutants were waiting with sour faces. They had likely heard that 2,000 people had been taken from them. They frowned. A greeting came from Schera.

"What's the matter, you look like you've eaten a bug. Did it taste that bad?"

Don't eat bugs; they may contain toxins. Eating one would ruin the stomach. Schera was not endowed with the insight to distinguish between edible and not edible. Same

with mushrooms. Each and every one looked suspicious, and Schera did not have the judgement. The best thing to do would be to have someone try eating it.

“That is not it! The troops have finally had high morale! They just do not understand! Major Schera leading should result in even greater war gains, yet!”

Katarina raged with enough temper that it seemed steam would come out from her head. She had through great trouble became an adjutant, yet suddenly, there was the crisis that her superior officer would drop to a common soldier. Furthermore, that their own forces had been reduced to 1,000 was no laughing matter.

“He should have seen the Major’s military achievements. It seems he somehow does not believe it. Yalder had fabricated it he said.”

“Ridiculous! There was no need to do such a thing-!””

“He would do anything to raise morale, is what I conclude our superiors to be thinking.”

“If I do fall to a common soldier, let’s do our best together. Ahh, treat me to food please. My wages will be deducted after all. If it comes down to it, I wonder if should sell this armor.”

Katarina’s face flushed when Schera lightly muttered, ‘It seems expensive.’ Katarina had just taken up a new post, and if Schera was suddenly dismissed, maybe there wouldn’t be a position for an adjutant at all.

“Major Schera-!”

“Your body won’t last if you stay agitated. There’s still much time until the operation starts.”

After looking at Katarina with eyes of sympathy, crunch, crunch, Schera started eating beans. The beans today were sweet. Jackpot. Today might be a good day.

“You heard the Major. Right, Honored Second Lieutenant Katarina?”

Vander put his hand on Katarina’s shoulder, and she violently shook it off and shouted in anger.

“Shut up-! I’ll show them. I’ll get some achievements somehow.
—-Right… If I don’t overcome this adversity, me becoming an adjutant would have no meaning.”

Katarina started fervently muttering with dazed eyes. Vander put his hands up in surrender, seeing that she had gone to her own faraway world.
Schera ate the rest of the beans while gazing at her, seemingly very interested.

—-In years to come, this clash would be known as The Battle of Alucia Crossing. Its outbreak was near at hand.

Chapter 13: Red Sauce Garnished Walnuts Taste Strange; Delicious

One week after the operation had been decided, David departed from Belta, leading 15,000 troops under his command. He set up camp on his side of Sulawesi Grand Bridge and hoisted the flag of the corps commander.
The Liberation Army in response, as if hailing them, also spread out their forces on the opposite shore. They were showing their intent of 'You shall not cross.' As if they would let Antigua, which they so arduously took possession of, fall so easily.
Seeing their camp, David snickered.

"From a rough look, perhaps 40,000? It seems drawing out the main force has gone according to plan."

"We too as per the plan have pretended to have reinforcement forces continuously arriving. All that is left is to root the enemy to the spot it appears."

Said the Chief Staff Officer, and David nodded.

"We should order the officers and men to make sure to not be negligent… We must also restrict them from forcibly crossing the river. Strengthen the surveillance."

"As I have been informed. Scouts have been sent to the riverbank, and our lookout preparations are complete."

"Just as I would expect of you, Chief Staff Officer. You work as fast as ever."

"I tremblingly accept your praise."

The Chief Staff Officer respectfully lowered his head.

"It'll be a long journey from hereon. I will be carefully watching the execution of the plan from this headquarters."

David headed back, and the staff officers followed after him. The stare-down continued endlessly. Sometimes, horns or drums would sound out, and signs that they were about to attack were repeated over and over. With not even a single arrow fired, the day bade welcome to night.

—-Alucia River, River Crossing Site.
The construction soldiers, waiting until night, lined up small boats until the opposite shore, and built a bridge of wooden boards. As of now, there still were not signs of enemy soldiers. They had not been detected.
After a few hours, several floating bridges were being created. The faces of the construction soldiers showed a little impatience. If they were discovered now, it would be all too simple to send them all underwater. They would be faced with annihilation perhaps. Even so, they safely completed their duty. When the final one was tied down, the construction soldiers went onto land. They would reinforce the bridges until

carts could cross them, and they sent a signal to the cavalry of the First Division. The sky was growing brighter. The sun would rise shortly.

“The establishment of multiple pontoon bridges has been completed. The rest is up to you. We, as soon as the First Division crosses the river, will construct a bridgehead position.”

“Well done completing your duty. Leave the rest to us. We’ll trample them in one fell swoop, just watch us!”

The commander of the cavalry, Major General Alexei encouragingly nodded. The head of the construction soldiers straightened his back and saluted.

“Sir- May the fortunes of war be with you!”

Although the air was pleasantly cool, tensions were rising.
—-The ones to start the battle will be us.
Major General Alexei unsheathed his sword and gave his orders to the soldiers under his command.

“First Division, Advance Cavalry, sortie! Target, Branch Castle Antigua!”

“Ou!”

“Start the advance! Stay in file-!!”

The 10,000 cavalry unit that would be sent ahead started crossing Alucia River via the pontoon bridges. Although several horsemen who had not been trained enough fell into the river, by and large they were favorably successful in crossing. They moved out to Alucia Plains, not being discovered by the enemy. Schera’s cavalry unit crossed last as the rear guard.

“Kind of shaky. I feel like I’m going to vomit.”

“Cannot be helped; it will be for an instant. Please take care to not fall off.”

“It will be a funny story if a Second Lieutenant falls off huh, Second Lieutenant Katarina. Take care now.”

“I will not fall off!”

“You’ll scare the horses so don’t be so loud. Do it again and I will be the one to push you off.”

Reprimanded Schera in a commanding voice, and Katarina’s shoulders drooped. Vander next to her was gently soothing her in a humorous manner, going, “there, there.”

None of Schera’s cavalry unit fell off. They had not raised their new flag incidentally. The adjutants had prevented it, thinking it too indecorum. Though, the cavalry members intended to swap flags once they saw a chance to.

Ascertaining that the First Division has successfully crossed the river, the construction soldiers continuing work and started constructing an encampment at the Alucia River

crossing site.
They started setting up to usher in the supply unit. Concurrently, the main force of the Second Division, the mixed Fourth Army Infantry division, started crossing the river. They were a large army of 50,000, and it seemed it would require considerable time to finish crossing.

Major General Alexei, entrusted as the vanguard, readily marched to Alucia Plains. Mysteriously, not even a single enemy soldier was to be found. Perhaps their entire military force had headed to the Grand Bridge. Or so Alexei thought. The Second Division was still lagging behind them, and currently, they were in a long, column formation. The only thing the advance cavalry unit had to pay attention to were the movements of the enemy's main force setup at Sulawesi Grand Bridge. In a situation where they were to change direction, the cavalry would have to ambush them. Upon that stalemate would come David's unit, which was aiming to distract them on their side of the bridge, to assault them from the rear.

"Okay, someone! Go check to see if the enemy's main force is moving or not from the Grand Bridge!"

"Sir- Please leave it to me!"

"Another rider, go check the condition of the march behind us. Make haste!"

"Understood!"

Two of his guards were sent out for reconnaissance, and for the moment, the First Division halted. Because there was not a bit of enemy resistance, the march had gone on too smoothly. In this interval, they would rest their horses, and all the group members would partake in a meal.
Schera as well greedily consumed the provisions she was carrying.
It was still just past noon at the time. Before capturing Antigua and before night fell, they wanted to sent up a battle formation so that the infantry unit could immediately set up siege.

A single rider rushed up to Alexei, who was sitting on a simple chair and arranging their progress with the adjutants and a map spread out. Without a moment's delay, he dismounted and loudly reported.

"Major General Alexei! Figures of enemy forces can be seen at Alucia Plains in front of us! It's the insignia of the Rebel Army's leader, Altura's! She's leading several thousand infantry!"

"What'd you say!? That insurgent girl had nonchalantly come out here!?"

Shouted Alexei, involuntarily standing up. Right in front of his eyes, the road to fame was opened. The was no option but to apprehend her. If he got her head, he would most certainly be promoted. He ought to go. Alexei decided, impatient.

"Your Excellency, this is a chance that will not come again. If we slay her here, everything will be resolved. There might not even be a need for Antigua to fall."

"The greatest achievement will be yours, Major General Alexei!"

“I know! Signal the cavalrymen. We will immediately start the attack!”

“Sir-!”

“Altura’s head will be taken by our hands!! We will have any reward we desire!!”

Under the vigorously hotblooded Alexei’s order, the First Division cavalry wholeheartedly rushed towards Altura’s unit.
Almost as they had expected that, the Liberation Army started retreating like escaping rabbits without meeting them.
A slow platoon was crushed by the hands of the cavalry. The cavalry unit’s momentum was fierce, with bait right under their eyes.
Alexei had not noticed, but the First Division and the Second Division were already separated by a considerable distance. The Second Division, as they were a mix of units, had a disturbed chain of command, and it was difficult to just march. There were many deserters, and morale was low.

Since the rear guard did not need to participate in fighting, Schera’s cavalry unit poised at a middle area. After all, it would be completely preposterous, not even worthy as joke, for Altura’s head to be taken by a little girl. Deeming that now was the only opportunity they would get, Schera’s cavalry soldiers were switching flags. Catching the wind, the flag of a white crow on a black background triumphantly fluttered over them.
The area was dyed by the setting sun. It would soon become the perilous nighttime.

“……Will we not be pursuing them? Major Schera.”

“We can’t go against an order so. Let’s just resign ourselves and loiter around here. We just can’t be negligent on lookout for a surprise attack.”

She signaled to the cavalrymen near her, designating them as the lookouts.

“However, if you take her head in Rebel Army territory, anyone and everyone will recognize you!”

“I have no interest in eating food laced with poison. In those times, it would be proper to let someone else eat it.”

Dismounted, Schera took out a walnut that she had placed in her bag. She crouched and broke the shell with her large scythe. The nut was also shattered, so she started putting the fragments in her mouth.
Vander, whispered into Katarina’s ear such that his superior officer wouldn’t hear.

“When Major’s doing that, she’s like a small animal.”

“You shut up!”

From a distance, the rider dispatched by Alexei earlier as a scout returned with an urgent expression. The main force at Sulawesi Grand Bridge was probably headed their way.

“W, where has Major General Alexei gone to!?”

“His Excellency has gone further westward pursuing the enemy leader. What’s the matter? Calm down and tell me what you’ve seen.”

When Schera stood up and enquired, she received a surprising turn of events.

“The main force at Sulawesi Grand Bridge was fake. Certainly, they are numerous, but half of them are demilitarized civilians. The main force of the Rebel Army is somewhere else!”

“Quickly report to His Excellency Alexei.”

“You don’t have to tell me I know! You guys too hurry up and link up!”

He spurred on his horse and chased after the main unit of Alexei’s. Seeing him go off, Schera crossed her arms.

“Hmm, what shall we do I wonder.”

“……The main force is not at the Grand Bridge, which means that they put emphasis on defending Antigua? No, that has no strategic value. ……Don’t tell me we’re surrounded?”

Vander spread out the map he had and checked. Katarina followed suit, and stated her opinion.

“……Major. I believe we are in quite a dangerous position. Earlier, that force of Altura’s has an extremely high possibility of being bait I think.”

“I see.”

“If we move carelessly, there is the danger that we will be hit by an ambush. Immediately, the scouts—-”

Another rider came running. His face was also extremely agitated.

“Where did His Excellency Major General Alexei go!!? I have urgent news!!”

“His Excellency has marched forward to pursue enemy forces! What is happening!?”

“Our river crossing site is being attacked! They are completed besieged-!!”

“—-No, no way.”

—-Antigua Branch Castle was the bottom of a bag. Alucia crossing site was the entrance to the bag.
The Kingdom’s Army, of their own volition, had entered this giant “bag,” this hell. The fact that the forces of David’s unit at Sulawesi Grand Bridge was a ruse had been completely seen through. As a plan, it wasn’t bad, but with the secret out, the plan had no substance.
This plan was ill-suited in the first place for the Kingdom’s Army with its numerous colluders and deserters. Furthermore, because of the mixed units that had been recently reorganized, no one was suspicious, even though spies had infiltrated them. Their information had gone completely to the other side.

The cavalry of the First Division were pulled in by Altura. The Second Division ventured to cross the river, and just as they were crossing, ambushers attacked the platoon bridges, and they were destroyed. Along with the Third Division, the supply train, they were divided. Completely surrounded, with Alucia River at their backs and the Liberation Army that had lay concealed at their front, they ate a devastating offensive. The infantry of the Second Division, trying to flee, increasingly became corpses. There were also people who were pushed into the river and drowned. As they were wearing armor, they could not sufficiently swim in places where the water was deep.
The encampment that should have become the beachhead was currently like a picture from hell.

"What should we do? Vander, Katarina, say your opinions."

"S, sir. Our troops are merely 1,000. There is no meaning in us going to reinforce the crossing site. I believe we ought to merge with Major General Alexei, who I fear is about to be ambushed. Currently, with the Third Division unable to merge with us, the capture of Antigua will fail. If we do not think about withdrawing…"

Katarina stated her opinion, and Vander his.

"Further, there is also the possibility of us being destroyed. We cannot think about how to deal with the cavalry that was baited."

"Major Schera. Either way, there is no time. Your decision."

"Alright, we—-"

"Major! Enemy cavalry unit approaching-! Their numbers are about 1,000!"

A horseman in the middle of lookout discovered a cloud of dust of enemy cavalry. Schera jumped onto her horse and raised her large scythe.

"We intercept them!! Follow me! Kill them, leave not one of the Rebel Army lot alive!-!!"*

"Ou-!!"

Schera and her forces started galloping towards the enemy cavalry. The white crow of the battleflag, basked in the evening sun, was bathed red like blood. The adjutants also followed her, though while confused at the appearance of their superior officer behaving differently than normal. Was this really the same person? They did not have the confidence to say.

Cavalry raising a black battleflag collided into the side of the cavalry raising the flag of the Liberation Army. Schera fluidly robbed four men of their heads, and once again harshly shouted. In a wedge formation with their commander as the tip, Schera's unit on the assault split the enemy into two.

"W, wha who are you guys-!"

"Whose unit! You lot, are the Kingdom's Army-!??"

"We are Death's cavalry. Now you know, hurry up and die!"

While impelling everyone behind her, she mowed down the dismayed cavalry. A rider who had lost the upper half of his body was carried forward. She spurred on her horse and swung her scythe in all directions, cutting ferociously.
A thrusted spear had its tip cut off, and the soldier's head was blown off by the scythe that traced out a wide arc and came back. A man who resolutely raised his sword over his head was split vertically from the helmet. Blood and gray matter mixed and scattered like trickling fluid when biting a berry.
That sensation when she crushed the skull–it was like that walnut she ate earlier, and her appetite was involuntarily stimulated. Hard on the inside, but soft on the inside. Food was very mysterious. Speaking of which, there were still walnuts inside her bag.
Schera took out a walnut, put strength in her crimson hand, and crushed it.
The nut mixed with someone's blood, and it came to look like some sauce.
She tried tentatively licking it, and it tasted like iron. Was it tasty? She didn't really know.
She decided to try giving it another lick.

And then a nuisance appeared. Schera wiped her mouth and turned around.

"You're the commander!? Your army is already collapsing! Give up and surrender! You'll at least save your life!"

A commander who thought himself of high cachet closed in on Schera's dilemma while raising his voice.

"Ahaha-! The only joke's your face!!"

"—-Stop your useless resistance-!!"

Spear and scythe crossed. Horses stopped, they locked weapons. They intensified their grips on their weapons. The man's face changed to one of anguish.

"S, strong, w, what's with you-!"

"Come on come on, my scythe's gradually getting closer it seems. If you don't persevere, you'll get stabbed you know?"

"Kuh, s, stop. S, stop please-"

"That's impossible. You, are the Rebel Army after all."

—-The one who dominated the binding of weapons, was Schera.
Simultaneously repelling him, the scythe's point stabbed into the commander's face. Schera pushed hard, and his face caved-in.

"U, guge-"

The body of the Liberation Army general spasmed in intense pain. He was still living.

"Now your face has become a joke. Congratulations."

When she slowly pulled out, blood spray spewed out. Schera showered in it and was painted deep red. Not giving him the finishing blow, she knocked him off his horse. Several seconds later, he would probably lose consciousness and die though. She thought his manner of twitching was like a fish washed up on land.

When their commander was killed, the unit prepared to flee. Schera's unit, after being thoroughly riled up, routed the enemy cavalry unit.

While shocked, Katarina acknowledged her superior officer's effort. Schera's strength, as she had imagined, no, even more than she had imagined, gripped her. Her tongue wouldn't move well. Her brain as an adjutant didn't function.

"T, that was splendid Major Schera! Our unit's damage is negligible. It is an overwhelming victory!"

"Alright, we will continue and meet up with Major General Alexei! Cavalry Unit, after me!"

"Sir-!"

Schera's unit dashed in the evening light. Schera's body was covered in blood, and the crow carved onto her armor had changed to red. Blood unceasingly dripped and fell from her scythe. In just today, how many lives had she reaped? She herself also didn't know.

The other party, the advance cavalry unit lead by Alexei, around 10,000 riders, invaded up to the vicinity of Antigua, caught by Altura's diversion. His ambition of wanting to kill her by whatever means necessary now could not be stopped.

"Your, Your Excellency Major General, do you not think we have pushed out too far? The ones behind us—-"

"Like I care. Isn't our target Antigua anyway? Being able to eliminate a nuisance is in fact convenient for us."

"S, still."

In the middle of the Adjutant urging caution, the drawbridge of Antigua Branch Castle lowered, and a cavalry unit rushed out savagely from inside the castle.
It was Fynn's elite unit, publicizing the Flag of the Lion. They had stored their strength and waited for an opportunity all this time. Altura's unit that was pretending to be routed combined with them, turned around, and contributed to the counteroffensive.

"Your Excellency! The enemy has launched themselves on us!'

"Don't be flustered! The enemy is a small force, keep calm and counterattack!"

In accordance with Alexei's directions, the cavalry in the front set out. The cavalry unit changed their formation, as if trying to wrap them up, to the inverted wedge formation.
Then a report came in again.

“Bad news Your Excellency! Our plan has been seen through!”

“What do you mean!??”

“The enemy’s main force has attacked the crossing site. The Second Division is besieged!! The Third Division is unable to cross the river and are at a standstill!! We are completely isolated!”

“W, what did you say!?”

“New supply of enemy troops! T, they’re coming from the left and right!!”

The spread out two wings–the beast dashed while baring its fangs to tear them off.

“—-T, that’s ridiculous. Why. W, why is a main force of the enemy here….”

Alexei was shocked, and as he was overcome with surprise, ambushers from the left and right beat their wardrums and resolutely started an assault.
Enemy soldiers were approaching their headquarters that was low in manpower. Under the command of Liberation Army Commander Behrouz, they were his picked troops that he moved like his own limbs.
Due to Altura taking command of the troops, their morale had raised to maximum. No one bore any anxiety.
Under pressure from the left and right, the vanguard cavalry unit was forced to take a close formation, and their numbers were gradually diminishing.
Mobility was a cavalry’s life. They were fragile if surrounded. Warhorses that had lost their riders ran around aimlessly.
His voice dry, Alexei decided to take command, but the progress of battle was already no longer in his hands. Making soldiers who had fallen into chaos to be steady would be difficult no matter how great or famous the commander.
Charging onto them, the Lion’s Cavalry split their troops and pushed in. Their vanguard was Lieutenant Colonel Fynn. He took steady aim while spinning his spear. He repelled Alexei’s elite guards and drew near with the force of raging tides.

“Heeeyy-! Don’t be distracted! You bastards, aren’t you listening to my orders-!! Don’t let the enemy soldiers approach me, defend, defend without fail-!!”

“I see you, Major General of the Kingdom’s Army, Sir Alexei! I will have your head!!”

“S, Silence scoundrel-!”

Alexei took his sword and fought against him, but Fynn’s long spear stabbed into his heart. His ambition was vanishing along with his life. As a simple finishing blow, his head was cut off horizontally. The battlefield bursted into cheers, and at their limits, the Kingdom’s cavalry whose morale had fallen to tatters scattered in every direction. The Liberation Army persistently continued pursuit and killed half of them. The First Division was pretty much annihilated. Many soldiers of the Kingdom and battle flags were tragically abandoned.

Moving to meet up with the advance cavalry unit, Schera and company discovered the defeated cavalry of the Kingdom. The several tens of Liberation Army cavalry in pursuit were crushingly mowed down in payback. She asked for the circumstances.

"Where is Major General Alexei? Is he safe?"

"……His Excellency Alexei was killed in battle. We fell into a state of complete anarchy due to the enemy's encirclement, and escaped in all four directions for dear life. What happened afterwards I do not know."

Muttered the soldier saved from his predicament while putting his breathing in order. The cavalry that were saved all bore wounds. There were none that could not move. The men that couldn't were already left behind and had fallen into enemy hands probably.

"I see, so he died huh. You've done well to make it safely back. Lucky for you. Come, you should get treated at once. It would be a shame if you died. —-Someone, come treat this person!"

Death gently stroked his shoulders, and the wounded soldier twitched and stiffened. A nearby soldier rogered while performing a respectful bow.

"Sir-! Understood."

After instructing for the treatment of the remnants of the defeated army, Schera faced her adjutants.

"What ought we do after this? Your opinions."

"……The sun will fall soon. We can only slip into the night, march, and find a place we can somehow cross the river."

"However, places where we can cross are few in number. I think we should hold back and watch. The places we will head to will assuredly have ambushes."

Vander pointed out several places on his map. He was a pragmatic man, and was starting to think that surrender was inevitable. That he had almost no loyalty to the Kingdom, was actually his true feelings. He didn't know what his colleague Katarina was thinking though; she had an easy to understand personality he thought, but there was something strange about her.
He could say the same for this respected, young hero though. There was something uncanny.

"What do you think became of the river crossing site?"

"……I do not know. However, it would be dangerous to think optimistically. We ought to act while assuming the worst."

"What about the possibility that they've crossed the bridge, noticing that General David was a ruse?"

"That, I do not know, but I fear they are in a confrontation."

In all probability, they probably couldn't move. David was attached to his very first strategy, and he would not cross the bridge. Similarly, reinforcements would probably not come from the crossing site, expressed Katarina, giving her own personal opinion.

"……Alright, we will head *northward* and rest for a short while. We will recover the

remnants of the First Division, and then devise to retreat."

"N, northward? But Sulawesi Grand Bridge is in that direction……"

"That was my intention. If we can confidently make it back, then that is undeniably good. Even if something like a pontoon bridge isn't built, haven't we already dealt with bigger things? I've also used it myself to escape once so. If you get it, then we will hurry and depart. First, I have to have a meal."

Schera shouldered her scythe and began galloping as the vanguard. The white crows silently started following after her. Hoisted on diagonally-forward spears, they started the parade. Perhaps they were no longer feeling fear–The light in the cavalrymen's eyes had vanished. They just simply followed the instructions of Schera, their superior officer. There was not a single sound of insecurity. Their formation was precise, and their horses advanced forward, focusing on the darkness in front of them.
Vander thought that very eerie.
Katarina was trembling in delight. Her eyes weren't wrong. This girl, was definitely, a God of Death, she thought. She was convinced. She wiped off the blood adhered to her glasses, and moved her horse in line beside Schera's.
She was glad to be alive. So glad. Katarina wanted to loudly shout.

Schera's unit camped at night in a place hard to be discovered by the enemy, and met and recovered cavalrymen from the defeated First Division. In total, they were now 2,500, and they planned to change course for Sulawesi. The defeated cavalrymen, every single one of them, were those that had been taken away from Schera's unit, and they had as if enthralled by Death came in a straight line to Schera's campground.
Vander was lost for words, and he felt chills on his spine. Such a ridiculous thing couldn't happen, he thought. How could these defeated soldiers know of this place? It was unimaginable no matter how one used common sense. They were not broadcasting this location either, no way they could build something like a fire. They were stifling their breaths so as not to stand out. Why? How? He was drowning in doubt.
—-And then, the scariest thing was not a single person thought this strange. As if this was something obvious, the cavalrymen had welcomed them with smiles. The escaped people too, were more pleased that they were able to be reunited than they were at having their lives saved.
Vander could not understand no matter how he thought.
Katarina took it as was it was. It turned out like this, so this is how it should be, she said.

—-The battleflags of Schera's unit melted into the darkness, but they were raised high as if on display.
The soldiers held them over their heads, while smiling as if they had gone mad somewhere.
As if not feeling fatigue, they continued. And continued.
Every soldier except Vander, was looking up at the flags.
A bird prowled the dark scenery–an ominous bird that governed life and death. These men had come home, with this black flag as their objective.
Schera chewed on dried meat while gazing at them, and she laughed happily, and mischievously.

*Schera’s speech pattern changes. Hopefully my translation accurately reflects that she is now more forceful and no longer as lofty.

Chapter 14: Food Eaten With Everyone After Exercise is Delicious

Sulawesi Grand Bridge, David's diversion unit headquarters.
Thinking that they had successfully pinned down the enemy main force, David was in an extremely good mood. He composedly sat in his chair, and was waiting for time to pass while drinking cider. There's no battle this comfortable, probably. Just by taking a battle formation, victory was in their hands.

"Hmph, those Rebel Army guys aren't such a big deal. After all this, are the insurgents little girls? Friggen Yalder, to have fallen behind these kind of guys. He'll never be called a brave general ever again."

"Certainly, General Yalder was weak-minded. He did receive his just-desserts though."

"This time, there will be no mercy. We will continue to Antigua, and Salvador Fortress will also fall. We'll massacre all the survivors together. We'll also weed out those that worked with them. So that a matter like this never occurs again, we will thoroughly do them in."

David stabbed a knife onto the Rebel Army's stronghold on the map.

"……However, they are not showing any movements entirely. Despite us already confronting them for three days. They have not even shown a sign of changing course. Are they planning on abandoning Antigua?"

"They're probably scared of a pursuit attack and can't move. After all, they are a gathering of small fry. They can't advance, they can't withdraw, enemy though they may be, I pity them. They aren't worthy of sympathy."

Replied David, confidently, at the Chief Staff Officer's words.

"While we are like this, it is probably about time our main body has arrived at Antigua. I believe it is likely they are in the middle of the siege. Or maybe even it has already fallen."

"Umu. They're truly idiots. They probably know what has befallen their castle about now. How about tying a letter to an arrow and letting them know? They'll think it's a sham, but it's real heh. Once they know, they'll be helpless!"

When David laughed loudly, the servile Chief Staff Officer also smiled. Victory was before his eyes. He expected information to reach them that they made Antigua surrender soon. If the enemy planned on staying, then they would be pincered from Antigua.
The enemy's momentum would be halted, and if they retreated to their headquarters, Salvador Fortress, they would pursued at once. After that, they would start the clean up, and it would be the best chance to accrue achievements.
Trample, pillage, and then massacre. The things soldiers wanted. Military officers surely were also filled with fighting spirit. The door to glory would soon be opened.
—-Interrupting him, the sounds of horns reverberating sonorously could be heard.

Following were the sounds of drums and chimes.

"—-So they're doing that too huh. Let them unreservedly and gaudily play. It's good entertainment."

"……? No, they have not given the order for a fake attack today yet."

A staff officer stated his doubt, but he was brushed away with a 'whatever.' Since the unit would currently not move out, there was no need to care about military regulations.
A short time later, a messenger came to David's headquarters with a report.

"Excuse me, Your Excellency!"

A staff officer enquired to the messenger who executed a salute.

"What's up?"

"Sir- The confronted Rebel Army has movement. An enemy force composed mostly of infantry is advancing to Sulawesi Grand Bridge!"

"Hmph, idiotic pretense. Is this a desperation move? They're just asking to be crushed."

David drained his cider while amazed.

"Your Excellency, there is no need to panic. Let us wait and make it rain arrows. I believe they are just testing the waters. If we go for an offensive, they will easily retreat."

"I leave it to you Chief Staff Officer. I permit you to pursue a little. But, avoid chasing too far. There is absolutely no need to lose troops over something so trivial."

"Sir-, please leave it to me. I will immediately drive them away."

The Chief Staff Officer gave his instructions, and the messenger double timed back to the vanguard.
Then, another messenger flew in. This time, it was different than last time. His face was agitated.

"P, please excuse me-!"

His face was caked in mud and sweat, he bore wounds, and his breathing was haggard. David unwittingly grimaced and berated the messenger before he could speak up.

"You are a messenger of the glorious Kingdom's Army aren't you? With such an appearance, can you really accurately communicate your information?"

"Y, Your Excellency, b, bad news-!"

"Calm down you fool. You're so noisy, what the heck happened!

"The First Division aiming for A, Antigua was destroyed! Major General Alexei was killed in action! The advance cavalry unit was annihilated!"

At the messenger's voice, the place fell silent. No one could speak up. The messenger continued and reported sad news.

"The Second Division that crossed the river have their backs to it and were suddenly attacked! They were besieged, lost half their numbers, and are preparing to flee-!!"

"D, don't screw with me! Like there would be something so ridiculous-!! Check one more time! Isn't the enemy's main force right in front of our eyes!?"

David threw down the glass in his hands. But, the report was not over yet.

"The enemy has reconstructed the destroyed pontoon bridges and crushed the Third Division. Furthermore, they are heading this way!!"

They crushed the First Division, routed the Second Division infantry unit, and afterwards repaired and reconstructed the pontoon bridges. The Third Division at a standstill before the river crossing had encountered them. As they were a force mainly of siege weapons and supply convoys, they were annihilated with no means of resistance.

Having crossed the river, the Liberation Army main forces were not heading to Belta but to Sulawesi Grand Bridge.
They had not prepared the siege weapons necessary to assault Belta, but more importantly, Sulawesi Grand Bridge was an important position that they wanted under their control. If they took this place, that would be similar to driving a wedge into the Belta area.

"—-Lies. I, I can't believe it. This is misinformation. No, the enemy's lie no doubt!"

David stood up while trembling. The staff officers' faces were pale. If this was true, staying here would be too dangerous, since the enemy's main force that crossed the river would be heading here. They would be pincered.

"Your Excellency, the vanguard has started battle at the Grand Bridge, and many of the enemy are trying to cross the river using ferry boats!"

"Shoot them down with arrows!! Absolutely do not let them approach!"

"Roger sir-, understood!"

"Your Excellency, we must urgently pull troops from Belta. We will be pincered like this."

"Silence-, continue the strategy! Soon, a report that Antigua has been taken control of will come, surely-! Going along with these lies is going along with the enemy's plan right!? I won't be tricked-!"

David kicked away his command post desk. The Fourth Army's main force was still going strong. He could only believe that. They were only a mish-mash of insurgents; a defeat was impossible. That he, David, would be defeated was impossible.
—-The final piece of information flew in for the agitated David.

"Reporting-! A great number of enemy soldiers has been confirmed from the south; their flag is the Rebel Army's! We are being attacked from the side-!"

The violent sounds of war could be heard. From far away were the coming sounds of horses' hooves.
Time, for David, stopped

Sulawesi Grand Bridge, Liberation Army encampment on the opposite shore.
Having confirmed the progress of battle, a silver-haired general was nodding many times.
He was the commander who led the main force unit that David was thinking of.

"To not have seen through the decoy from the very beginning, how pitiful."

"It would suck to be them huh. To have every particular of their strategy seen though, just judging from their staff officers, they are crazy. Just thinking about it gives me the shivers."

"Taking that into consideration, the ones that set up this strategy were probably the staff officers. That they don't know of our army is proof. Those guys will be defeated just as they should be."

Muttered the Colonel silently, and a staff officer agreed.

"The Colonel's words pains my ears. Although our morale is sufficient, we are insecure about our skill therefore…"

This diversion unit in particular was an assembled force of 10,000 regular soldiers, 5,000 militiamen, and the rest were volunteering civilians. Due to their battleflags and phony straw soldiers, they kind of appeared something like 30,000 or 40,000.

"But, one cannot win a battle with just skill. It is the soldiers' morale that matters in the end. They must have the drive to win; they're nothing without it. No matter how one uses plans, or how an excellent commander commands."

"Certainly. We have an ideal that needs to be realized. We will not lose to the lot of the completely decayed Kingdom."

"That's the spirit. These old bones are a bit tired."

The Commander joking patted his back, and the Adjutant spoke up while smiling bitterly.

"We will work you until the end, Colonel."

The extremely comical monkey show of mutual decoys glaring at each other would soon end. They were coercively crossing from the front of the river using the bridges and small ferries. Their main force would attack from the side. The situation had completely reversed right now, and overrunning the enemy encampment was only a matter of time probably.
The Grand Bridge's defenses and offenses were equal, but the difference was that the

enemy would be completely pressured from the side by a unit hitting their flank. Just one more push, and the enemy that had fallen into chaos would be kicked aside, and they would take possession of Sulawesi Grand Bridge. They had already inflicted serious damage onto the enemy's defense forces, and it wouldn't be long before Belta Castle also fell probably.

The aged commander recalled the face of the young man who distinguished himself in this battle–the face of the Hero carrying the future Kingdom on his shoulders. He was a man who would realize their dreams without fail. He wondered if he would be able to see it with his own eyes.

"……You know, I heard Lieutenant Colonel Fynn took the head of the enemy commander again. What frightening performance as always. The Flag of the Lion is not just a decoration it seems."

He had smashed the enemy cavalry unit and had taken Major General Alexei's head he heard. He took it upon himself to pursue the remnants of the enemy Second Division it appeared.

"He will soon be the Hero of this battle I bet, Lieutenant Colonel Fynn will. His fame amongst the soldiers is also on the rise too. If he gets promoted again, he'll finally be on par with you huh."

"Princess Altura, and now Lieutenant Colonel Fynn, with this, the reputation of us old people will collapse. Hmph, we definitely don't want to lose to the youths. We'll just have to show them the difference in how long we've served, how about it?"

The commander exhaled with his nose and stood up. Old though he may be, he could still move his body. He took his battleaxe in hand, and swung it around, just warming up.

"The Colonel still has much active service left in him. ……Is it not about time we also go for a full on charge?"

"Okay! Shove the rear guard infantry unit to the front. Tell the civilians that have cooperated with us to stand back. The outcome of this battle has already been decided. All that's left is to squash them. We'll splendidly take the enemy commander's head, and devote our battle Princess Altura how about it!?"

"Sir-, Understood!!"

—-The Liberation Army, Sulawesi Grand Bridge diversion unit, started the attack.
This battle should have been concluded with this one attack.
David's 20,000 were pulverized from the front, and they had already fallen into pandemonium. They were inferior in numbers, lacked leadership ability, and their soldiers had not the will to fight. As a consequence of the mixed units which had been haphazardly merged, each unit's cooperation was in a sorry state. Already, the units would collapse before long, and the Liberation Army would be able to rout them.
Every one of the Liberation Army generals nearby Sulawesi Grand Bridge expected an overwhelmingly favourable victory for the Liberation Army. This battle should have ended.

Until behind the civilians who breathed sighs of relief, bathing in their victory, a white, ominous bird appeared. It was a unit galloping with terrible speed, in ranks with not one thread out of file, uninvited to the party. The people watched them with smiles. It was reinforcements from Salvador Fortress. They waved their hands in their air and beckoned them. Someone even raised a cheer. They linked shoulders and were laughing.
These men no longer oppressed smiled from their souls.
They had finally been liberated, and they were content from the bottom of their hearts.
—-Until a blood-stained scythe would mercilessly swoop down on them.

Now at an audaciously close distance, Schera's Cavalry had gone northward, aiming for Sulawesi Grand Bridge. They had soundly shut down all the Liberation Army scouts, and they had finally arrived behind Sulawesi Grand Bridge. Luckily for them, they had not encountered an enemy unit.
Not a single horseman had defected. They had zero deserters. For a unit in the middle of a rout, this was almost unbelieveable. Their provisions carried on hand had already been exhausted. Schera was at the limits of her endurance. She was awfully hungry. Why did she have to experience such an empty hunger.

"Major, this is the last candy. Please help yourself."

"……"

When Katarina offered a sacrifice to Death, Schera silently took it and crunched it. Absolutely not enough. Her irritation due to the empty hunger did not stop. Her shouldered scythe was trembling in rage. Vander asked carefully, so as to not disturb that rage.

"Ma, Major. What will we do after this? In front of us, an enemy unit is lying in wait. We have made it this far safely. If we go a little more northward, there is a ford we can cross—-"

He cut his words off there–because he was glared at with bloodshot eyes. If he spoke poorly, it seemed like that maddened scythe would swing down at any moment. Schera was just in that bad a mood.

"Despite there being a shortcut right in front of our eyes, why is there a necessity to make a detour? —-Second Lieutenant Katarina. Are you of the same opinion?"

While oozing bloodlust from her small body, she glared at another adjutant.

"There is indeed no need. We will stab them in the rear, and they will only be smashed altogether. We can absolutely break through. I will devote even the last vestiges of my poor strength."

“That so? Then no problem. Let’s go.”

“Sir-, there is no problem at all. Major Schera.”

Katarina pushed up her glasses, and took out a small rod from her waist and elongated it. It was a telescoping, portable magic cane. This was the first time Vander had seen that cane. He had heard not a single word that this Second Lieutenant colleague of his had knowledge in sorcery.

“O, oi. You can use sorcery? I’ve never heard of it.”

“I just never said it. However, there is no longer a need to keep it hidden. For Major Schera’s sake, I will devote all my power. I had decided this some time ago. I will happily use pagan* magic. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. The daughter of a heretic is a heretic.”

Spoke Katarina rapidly on and on. Her eyes were the same as the other cavalry members.

“……What do you mean?”

Asked back Vander who could not understand. Katarina did not respond to that question.

2,500 cavalry waited for orders. For the order to charge and decimate. The horses neighed, sensing their bloodthirst, and their bodies shook.
Schera raised her scythe, and gave her command.

“Target: Sulawesi Grand Bridge! All members charge-!! Kill them!”

“”””””Ou-!!”””””

Their yells resonated, and Schera galloped down the hill at the vanguard. Her two adjutants followed, the 2,500 cavalry kicked up a cloud of dust, and they started dashing like a fierce wave. The Liberation Army flag was drawing closer. Many enemy soldiers began to notice Schera and her group. They soon started to let out cheers and waved their hands. They were welcoming Death. The unarmed civilian people were smiling. However, Schera’s expression did not change. Before her eyes were simply enemies. Food just waiting to be eaten.

“Wa, wait stop! Stop your hors—-”

Her scythe mowed down several civilians who tried to flee, and she went straight ahead. The cavalry following behind her charged while reaching with their spears, and they trampled and killed scores of people.

“Kill whoever you get your hands on! Don’t bother asking who they are! Kill all the Rebel Army-!”

Death gave her command, and the cavalrymen’s devastation began. Weaponless civilians ran, trying to escape. Some poorly equipped militiamen resisted, but they were pierced by spears thrusted from on horseback, and they died.
Schera massacred the enemy camp like cutting weeds. Her scythe flew left and right, spun like a watermill, and randomly cut off limbs. Her momentum did not stop, and

she rushed all way to the front of the enemy camp.

“S, spare us. W, we aren’t soldiers.”
“You guys, are the Kingdom right? Wh, why would you do this”
“Let us go—-”

Silently, towards these men who had sank to the ground, the scythe’s tempered edge extended, and killed them.
Accompanying her, Katarina pointed her cane towards their bodies and chanted a spell. It was necromancy, which manipulated soulless corpses. It was magic for people who had fallen off God’s path. There only one usable spell. The corpses could not move freely like the caster. There was also no way to move hundreds. It was her limit to move two. From self-study, she could only learn just this one spell.

“……Go.”

“How interesting that is. To reuse corpses, very intriguing.”

“Thank you very much, Major Schera!”

“What happens after?”

“This. ……Explode-!”

The reanimated corpses crawled deep into the enemy soldiers, and deliberately exploded. The blast swallowed the surrounding soldiers, and the area was pregnant with the smell of burning bodies.
Schera observed, seemingly very satisfied, and once again started the slaughter.

Vander took only humans that had weapons as his opponents. Before his eyes were clearly not soldiers. Only humans that seemed to live in farm villages until a few days ago. He had not become a soldier to slaughter the citizens, not to conduct this kind of indiscriminate slaughter.
He was different. He was different from them.

“Die-!”

“—-Shut up! Take this-!!”

Thrusted spears crossed, and stabbed into a body. Aiming for that opening, a lunged spear stabbed into Vander’s back. ‘Shit,’ he thought, but the arm was immature it seemed, and the spear’s tip grinded against his armor and was deflected. He pulled out his spear, intending to counterattack, and he hastily turned his horse’s head around. It was a Liberation Army soldier wearing crude armor on his body. His height, short. It appeared to be a boy soldier. Maybe about the same size as Schera, maybe even a little shorter. His face was still childish.
He was shaking in surprise that his spear that he had thrusted as hard as he could was deflected. He was completely disheartened.

“Tsk-, be obedient kid!! Do you have a deathwish!?”

“—-Hi- Ah, ah-”

“Don’t be so brazen-!”

Vander knocked away the boy soldier’s weapon with his spear. He did not have the intention of killing children.

—-But.

“I said to kill everyone, Second Lieutenant Vander.”

From behind the unarmed boy soldier, the blade of misfortune swung down. After a cry like a squeal, he died.

“……He was still a child, Major.”

Vander scowled at her, but Schera paid no mind and swung off the blood. She shifted her gaze, searching for her next prey.

“Then, why was he on the battlefield? If you will resent, resent the one who brought him here.”

“He could no longer fight-”

“If he can pick up a sword, he can still fight. And then, he will challenge you again. Are you not a soldier? Or are you a saint? Do you think we’re at a church?”

“——!”

“All members, gather-!! We will crush the enemy at the Grand Bridge-!!”

Under Schera’s command, the cavalry gathered, and turned their horses towards the Grand Bridge.

“Colonel, enemy attack from the rear! Cavalry are advancing while killing the civilians!!”

“What’d you say? Where the heck did they come from!? The enemy cavalry should have been annihilated right!?”

“B, but they’re here! Enemy has a white bird coat of arms on a black flag! Their vanguard is a commander holding a scythe!”

“The rumored Death God!? Alright, we’ll stop them in their tracks here. Absolutely do not let them break through the bridge! We’ll be laughed at if they can get away successfully!!”

The raiding cavalry that raised havoc for their supply trains from before. The unit associated with the name Death. He had heard of their rumored commander.

“Sir-! Infantry unit! Assemble the formation!! We’ll obstruct the Death God’s charge!!”

The infantry unit dispatched to the middle of the bridge, commanded, constructed a wall of spears. A cavalry certainly had rushing power, but they were weak against readied spears. They would absolutely hesitate, fearing death. If they encircled them at that time and attacked, there would be nothing to fear.

"Spear line, forward-!! Shoulder to shoulder-!"

"Spears, Braceeeeeeeeeee–!!"

The spearmen, overflowing with morale, braced their spears. From the direction their allies should have been, blood spurts flew, and an odd army came charging. While they were in a column formation, they were coming in just a single, straight line.

"Uooooooooooooo–!!"

"Spears-! Forwarddddddddd-!!"

"Dieeeeeeeeee–!!"

The troops holding the black flag plunged into the wall of spears with absolutely no hesitation. They propelled their spears from atop horseback and decided to run the spearmen over with their horses' momentum. They felt not a moment's indecision. Horses and rider were skewered. While being skewered, they were also taking down the enemy infantry. Soldiers that had fallen off their horses threw themselves off the Grand Bridge, making sure to take the enemy with them. Schera's unit had teared open a section of the spear line by sacrificing dozens of soldiers.
In that opening, Schera was swinging her scythe from atop her horse. Katarina, who had exhausted her magical power, was also swinging a sword. The regular soldiers of the Liberation Army were pushed back. They couldn't stop the enemy's momentum.

"The commander, kill that commander! That'll weaken the enemy's momentum-! Absolutely halt them-!"

"Colonel, you are too far forward! Please step back!"

The Adjutant stopped him, but he shook him off and wielded his battleaxe. He smashed a charging cavalryman. Though he inflicted a fatal wound, the rider was about to stand up again, so he cut off his head. What fearsome mettle, he was inwardly shocked. They were clearly different from the other soldiers of the Kingdom.

"Shut up! They'll break through the this bridge at this rate-!! You monsters-! What's with the force of their charge-"

"—-Colonel, this is dangerous!"

"Surround them with soldiers; flatten them with numbers!! Do not show them any leniency!"

Raising his voice, he encouraged his soldiers. One rider in black armor stood out conspicuously. She was their commander no doubt. When the Colonel thoughtlessly glared at her, he met her eyes.
Schera smiled like a little girl… whose face was covered in blood. The Colonel was entranced by Death.

"—-ah."

A small sickle stabbed into the face of the speechless Colonel. It was a throw with no prior movements. The commander of the Liberation Army diversion unit had easily died. The throat of the Adjutant who tried to help him up as well, was pierced by a thrown sickle.

David's Headquarters, being pincered.
Disastrous reports were coming in one after another. David's headquarters had also become perilous. He unsheathed his heirloom sword and steeled himself for when the time would come. A noble had to proudly die.

"Y, your Excellency. Please, you of all people must escape Your Excellency! We will open a way out to Belta!"

Spoke up the Chief Staff Officer, but David shook his head sideways.

"I, cannot. If I escape right now, we will be completely routed. If I had to run away and uncouthly die, I would die here! I have my pride as a noble-"

"B, but! Belta!"

If David escaped, it would be assured that they would be routed.
But, in this situation, it was the defeated commander's duty to save even a single soldier and repatriate to Belta. David may have his pride as a noble, but he was the worst commander. To David who stood at the head of the army with his elite guards, a report for the umpteenth time came.

"Your Excellency David-!"

"What is it this time! Have they finally broken through the bridge!?"

"R, reinforcements! Reinforcements from our army has come!!"

"Bullshit! Where the heck did they come from!? Don't tell me they abandoned Belta!!"

David was not fool enough to leave Belta Castle empty. He had sent out a messenger, and strictly told them to devote themselves to defense. As far as he was concerned, it was absolutely unthinkable for reinforcements to come from the Belta area.

"No-! Reinforcements from Sulawesi Grand Bridge!! They have boldly penetrated the enemy camp!"

For a second, David had thought this messenger had gone mad. The other staff officers as well. But, when he shifted his attention to the bridge, the situation was strange. David's unit that was being pushed back was making a comeback. The enemy's river crossing unit was also turning away without reaching land.

"Who!? Whose unit came!? Is it Alexei's cavalry-!??"

David naturally leaned forward in excitement. His voice cracked in anticipation.
Who. Who came? Did Alexei's cavalry survive? Reinforcements from the Royal Capital?
It would be difficult to believe, but it wasn't impossible for it to be volunteer soldiers.

"White crow coat of arms on a black flag!! The commander is unknown, but they are overrunning the enemy encampment!!"

"Y, Your Excellency. Please use this."

A staff officer handed over an eyepiece. It wasn't as good an Empire-made one, but one could see close enough to the Grand Bridge. David investigated steadily. A black flag and a white crow emblem. He hadn't seen it before. He had no recollection of there being such a family crest. Black was also bad luck.
He looked at the cavalrymen holding the flags. Everyone was fighting with terrific valor. They trampled the enemy without paying any mind to thrusted spears.
He stared at the especially conspicuous commander holding a scythe. She was wearing a helmet, but she had that characteristic short stature.
A young face covered in crimson blood. She was a young, female commander with a twisted smile while slashing at her prey.

"T, that's, S, Major Schera."

Her name escaped his lips, and he was lost for words. At such a fearsome manner of fighting, he could not articulate. She was splitting the enemy as if she was a veteran general. When he thought they had broken through the bridge, she gave a further command, and once again charged towards the opposite shore. The spirit of the enemy soldiers, who had not expected them to turn around, was completely crushed.The enemy unit who had lost their leader were like novices scrambling for their lives, trying to escape from Death's scythe. Following them from behind were the cavalrymen savagely swooping down on them. The Grand Bridge was awash with fresh blood.

"Y, Your Excellency David! We cannot just let this be. Take our forces on the bridge and allocate them to our flank, and then plan to retreat! I do not think we have faculty to fight the enemy's main force in a series of battle any more-!"

"……..:"

"—-Your Excellency! Major General David, Your Excellency-! Your orders immediately!"

"Ah, yeah. I, leave it to you. H, hurry and, deal with it."

"Sir-!"

The Chief Staff Officer barked his orders to the military officers angrily. They had to avoid being annihilated at all costs. They were desperate.

"……Th, that's a Death God. Certainly, Death itself. Was Y, Yalder right?"

While shivering, David gazed long at Schera's style of fighting, as if eating it up. He had completely forgotten about commanding.

Afterwards, the troops of David's unit assigned to the river bank and Grand Bridge were successfully moved to the flanks.
The Liberation Army contributing a fierce attack from the side were bewildered at a counterattack beyond their expectations. The unit that was on the verge of being routed had suddenly gotten a second wind and were making a comeback.

The Liberation Army that was striking from the side, though they were called the main force, were mostly comprised of only units swift on their feet. They stressed the ability to pincer, and they should have made the enemy take to their heels with a swift attack. After a series of battles, they had built up fatigue, and the soldiers' power had fallen as one would expect. Due to the difference in stamina and their declining might, the casualties on the Liberation Army side gradually started increasing.
The Liberation Army commander, Behrouz, deciding now was enough, temporarily pulled his soldiers back. There was also the report that many civilians and militiamen were victimized. He needed for the state of affairs to calm down.

David escaped from his predicament and somehow scurried back to Belta. Defeated soldiers were continuously returning. All the soldiers were completely exhausted. The Kingdom's Army had lost too many things in this battle.
—-Fourth Army surviving soldiers: 30,000.
A third had died in battle, and the rest had thrown down their swords and surrendered or deserted.
Driving a wedge into Belta, Sulawesi Grand Bridge was taken, and even the river crossing site was snatched away from them. Afterwards, the Liberation Army would probably close in on them like a noose around their necks.
David was angry and embarrassed, and he fell ill from his anxiety due to self-condemnation.

The Battle of Alucia Crossing ended in the crushing defeat for the Kingdom's Army. Their loss did not end in just losing troops and Sulawesi Grand Bridge. As the sun set on the Kingdom, it had the result of making known to the populace that the Kingdom no longer had the power to put an end to the Rebel Army. The victorious Liberation Army took the surrendered soldiers into their fold and further surged in power.

Schera quietly repatriated, taking her cavalry along with her. Each and every one was bloodstained, but they entered the castle as if proud of that. The castle garrison that had ushered them in could only watch them with held breaths. The white bird was painted deep crimson. Just how many lives had it sucked in.

While wearing her bloodied armor, Schera rushed into the barracks cafeteria. She took as much as she could, and headed to the camp grounds where her soldiers were waiting. All the surviving cavalrymen were smiling while eating together with their commander. That she was able to have an enjoyable meal with her comrades made Schera very happy.
After consuming enough for three men, Schera fell asleep with a contented smile.

—-As for those victimized civilians, their story would be handed down to posterity as “The Tragedy of Sulawesi Grand Bridge.” They boldly faced the Death God’s surprise attack, fought, and then died noble deaths; they were heroes. In commemoration of their altruism, a large monument to comfort their spirits would be erected beside the Grand Bridge.

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*外法 Eastern religious term that I have westernized for brevity.

Chapter 15: Even Rotten Fruit from a Distance Looks Delicious

One of the causes for the Kingdom’s decline could be said to be its harsh taxation. The wealthy who lived luxurious lived were one part, but the majority of the Kingdom’s citizens were comprised of peasants who were especially oppressed. Violent tax collectors would frequently turn up and take away what little property there was. Punishments would even be dispensed on people who could not pay the established amount. Same if they refused conscription. The peasants of the Kingdom were all sick of it.
Even so, the people who would rise up were few, since they had grown accustomed to being oppressed. Despite being under deathly hardship, despite all the people who would starve and die, they would not kill. But, when danger to one’s life actually approached, anyone would take up arms.
Humans were not ones to silently submit their necks. They were not going to be victims.
What had changed the lamentations of these men to seething rage was a single event.
—-It was the Tenang Rebellion.

Having emerged victorious in the battle a few days ago, the Royal Capital Liberation Army moved headquarters from Salvador Fortress to Branch Castle Antigua. They had also done so as there was the appeal of gradually drawing closer to the Royal Capital. They assimilated the surrendered soldiers and expanded in scope. They had also taken possession of Sulawesi Grand Bridge. Currently, they were capturing every fortress and town in the Belta area. Then, if Belta Castle where David had secluded himself fell, the Central Border Zone would completely fall under Liberation Army influence. It would solidify their weak foothold in the area, and it would become increasingly possible to launch an invasion in the Royal Capital’s direction.
As the Liberation Army continued to win consecutively, the might of their officers and men would rise in tandem. Though they had paid the price of not a few victims, for the sake of the oppressed citizens, they would voluntarily throw themselves into battle. Everyone embraced the hopes and dreams of their young symbol, Princess Altura.

—-Branch Castle Antigua Conference Room. Military officers and civil officers were arrayed.
Here, topics relating to military affairs, financial affairs, government and diplomacy were debated, and where Altura would give her ruling. As they were currently expanding their sphere of influence, there were a mountain of challenges. What they were discussing now was regarding the aftermath of the Alucia River engagement.

“—-In the other day’s battle, is it true that there were many civilian casualties? Why did Borjek have to die?”

Altura depressedly inquired. Colonel Borjek served long before she had raised an army and was an extremely helpful man, always taking care of her. He excelled at leadership and was a military man she could place faith in. She wanted to fight with him. She wanted him to watch over her.
The generals who happened to be present at the time were also making grieving faces. To that question, Tactician Diener reported that it was the "Truth."

"Yes. The the weaponless civilians who were *taking refuge* in the back were attacked by the Kingdom's cavalry. Having launched a surprise attack, that group of the Kingdom began to overrun them, gunning for only the civilians. Deciding to obstruct this atrocity, Colonel Borjek departed for the front, and though he boldly fought back, he was killed in battle. However, due to his noble sacrifice, he was successful in saving many civilians. Colonel Borjek absolutely did not die a meaningless death."

At Diener's words, the military officers showed expressions of indignation. Those guys were a disgrace to all military men, they thought. The Kingdom was rotten to this extent!?, they thought.
One group of people of course noticed that the "Truth" had been distorted when it was reported. But, they did not speak up. They reasoned that it wasn't all lies.

"……Diener. You said there should be no injury to the people. That is why I approved your dummy soldiers plan. Then, how did we end up with this kind of result?"

"I did not think that a commissioned officer of the Kingdom would *take the initiative* and target only the citizens. They hunted down only the weak, and their figures enjoyed themselves slaughtering as they pleased. It was like the work of a beast. They probably do not have any pride left as knights. It was completely my mistake, I, Diener."

Naturally, he had expected the possibility that there would be victims amongst the civilians. If his plan went well, he would hail the civilians as heroes. If they were caught in the crossfire and became victims, he would call it a tragedy. It would promote morale, and he would use it as material to spread groundless rumors, he schemed.
It was a definite truth that they, unarmed civilians and citizens of the very Kingdom, were killed. He would take that "Truth," mix in some exaggerations, and disseminate it, further circulating the Kingdom's bad reputation. He had already given his secret orders and released his agents into the Belta area. The fruits of his labor will show sooner or later.

"Give the families of the victims liberal remunerations. They cooperated with our dreams and lost their valuable lives. We have to surmount their sacrifices and realize our ideals. Diener, please help us."

"Sir- leave it to me. I will give the bereaved families suitable recompense."

"……Next report."

Hearing Princess Altura's words, a civil official plainly read aloud documents.

"A request for aid has come from a farm village under Liberation Army influence. It is a request saying they want goods and provisions as they are in poverty. ……There are many more identical to this one."

Many texts telling of wretched conditions had come addressed to Altura.

“Diener. Do we have any surplus goods?”

Lines of sight turned to Tactician Diener, who responded without a change in expression.

“There is no way we would have that amount of surplus, however we can not just overlook them. After all, the great cause that we stand for is to overthrow the current monarchy and rescue the suffering people of the Kingdom. That future will absolutely not come to those who cannot care for those below them.” Or take advantage of them.*

“Then, urgently give them charity. Show them the morality of our Liberation Army. As soon as possible, we must have the incompetent Kristoff off the throne.”

“I do understand. Please leave the matter of goods to me. We have received no shortage of support from the Empire–as a consequence of the Princess never wavering and betraying her faith.”

Many civil officials fixed their eyes on Diener with a look that asked, ‘just what are you saying?’, but, Altura showed no signs of noticing their behavior. If one were to talk about the civil officials, all of them knew that they had no surplus with their current finances. As they had just put Belta under their influence, their tax yields were not extremely high. It would still take some time until the chaos died down and they put a system of government in order.
Diener ignored the glances coming from the group of civil officials.

“I am begging you, Diener. I will be pushing hardships on you.”

“Those words alone are enough for me, Diener.”

Diener closed his eyes and lowered his head. Seeing that, Altura augustly nodded.

“Are there any other reports?”

“……..”

“Then, we will conclude here today. If anything happens, notify me immediately.”

“—-Sir-, understood.”

When Altura left her seat, the generals saluted and followed after her. Left behind was Diener, still sitting in his seat in the conference room, and vice commander of the Liberation Army, Prince Alan.
Alan approached Diener’s side, and spoke in a small voice.

“……Diener. You, are you planning on doing that again? Do you really think this is correct? You don’t know when Altura will find out.”

Alan was being notified of Diener’s activities from a unit of agents of the Empire. It was not a matter that could be disclosed, and there was a strict gag order on the participants. Those intelligence agents were Alan’s proteges, so he could trust them. Of course he was not informing his homeland, the Empire, since in the future, it

would become a weakness.
But, if it ever became intolerable, he planned on overthrowing Diener and banishing him. He could not let him become a cause of ruin for the Liberation Army.

"Absolutely, I am paying careful attention so that I do not get noticed. I am only allowing my own mercenaries to execute it. As long as they get paid a large amount of money, they will not say anything. They in fact will enjoy doing it."

He did not know how many hamlets they had attacked. They would plunder while disguised as Kingdom soldiers. They were originally humans who resorted to robbery. Gleefully, they were endeavoring in their duty. It ended at just pillaging; they had been instructed for the time being to not kill if possible.
Because in the end, these villages would enter under the control of the Liberation Army. Their labor was valuable. If his mercenaries grew too impudent and couldn't stay their hands, he would just get rid of them and hire the next batch. It was a very simple matter. Mercenaries were not the Liberation Army's companions, just disposable pieces.

"……."

Alan was silently listening.
Diener apathetically continued his talk.

"Moreover, I cannot make goods appear out of thin air. The world is not so generous. No matter what means I have to use, I will absolutely must obtain them. For the sake of our expanding Liberation Army, and for the sake of supporting the citizens entering under our jurisdiction. To bring about a time of peace requires an initial investment. These are emergency measures until we can expect steady tax revenue. …… Nevertheless, this ought to be the last time."

Calmly, but quickly, detailed Diener. The Central Border Zone was from the start a fertile land. If they raised the morale of the peasants and created an appropriate government, it would surely become wealthy. They could also expect commerce with each bordering nation.
They would remedy the excessive tax rate, perform a clean sweep of government officials and feudal lords lining their own pockets, and conduct a thorough reform. The Liberation Army had enticed them, guaranteeing their social position, chipped away at their political power, and stolen their power to resist. When they noticed they had been deceived, everything would be over probably. The Royal Capital Liberation Army had taken drastic measures in their duty to wash away the accumulated pus. However, to accomplish this, they needed tremendous support from the people, otherwise, it would all end as a pipedream.
An impetus was needed to change the people's hatred towards the Kingdom into support for the Liberation Army.

"This time will be the last? What do you mean Diener?"

"If we take complete control of the Central Border Zone, there will no longer be any need for these troublesome matters. Also, this final "Commodity Procurement Operation" will be the straw that breaks the camel's back for Belta Castle. Having suffered a crushing defeat, this right now is the greatest chance to erase the Kingdom's authority over this region."

Diener spread out a map on the table and pointed out Belta Castle. Behind it was the town of Tenang with a red mark on it. It was a place not included in their capturing plans.

"We are already capturing fortresses on the front line of Belta. What more are you planning? Are we not just going to wait for a proper time and encircle Belta's main castle?"

"—-Insufficient. Still not enough. The force of their fire is absolutely not enough. For our great cause, it has to become a hellfire strong enough to burn the entire Kingdom to the ground. ……The commander David can probably no longer move. He is frightened and only hardening the defenses. A commander who has lost his self-confidence, soldiers of the Kingdom in chaos, a populace with accumulated discontent, and the spreading infamy–all the kindle has been assembled. Afterwards, it just needs to catch fire."

"……You, what the heck are you thinking?"

When Alan looked at him with eyes of misgiving, Diener with a tranquil expression distinctly answered.

"Of course, only victory for the Liberation Army, and overthrowing the current monarchy. My life was used only for this one purpose. The Royal Capital Liberation Army is my everything."

"Do Altura's ideals really exist in you? Is this not too reckless? The one perverting her ideals the most, Diener, is it not you?"

"A clean war does not exist in this world, Your Highness Prince Alan. All that there is, is only a hideous reality that makes one want to avert their eyes. ……However, there are also things that do not need to be known. Princess Altura is fine as she is. The people see their aspirations in her. Humans as completely filthy like me as well."

He stood up from his seat, faced Prince Alan, and gazed into his eyes.

"……Prince Alan. Your cooperation is necessary. I would like you to shoulder the dirty work along with me. I want you defile yourself with dishonor enough to smear even your soul with blood. We will crown ourselves with filth.** After this war is over, I will take all the sins onto myself consequently."

Diener was making a bet. He had seen through that this man harbored personal feelings for Altura. Diener was also aware that these emotions very much exceeded his affection towards his fatherland. He would take advantage of that and pull Alan to his side. He would bind him hand and foot so that he could never turn back. This man could be expected to play the role of negotiator with the Empire. By all means, Diener wanted to entice him.

"……."

"……."

Alan avoided an immediate reply. It took resolution and determination to accept this proposal. He had to make sure he had it. To immediately cut down any selfish motives he may have, his hand reached for his sword.

"……..Will this truly be for Altura's sake?"

"So that her ideals may continue to be pure. Reality is not. Someone has to protect her from this dirty mud. We will be that shield. I want you to shoulder that role next to the Princess."

"……..I understand. I will listen to you. Do with me as you wish."

After a long silence, Alan consented.
Quietly, Diener spoke. Altura would certainly rage if she heard this plan. It was an act completely polar to her ideals. It sacrificed the few to save the many. It would not be strange for her to cut him down in such a situation. The other commissioned officers probably wouldn't stay silent either. Actually, having heard the matter, Alan was also enraged, and he seized Diener by the lapels.

—-For the sake of victory for the Royal Capital Liberation Army, Diener sold his soul.

In a place slightly east of Belta Castle was a town called Tenang. Protected by low ramparts, it was a simple and commonplace hamlet with no redeeming features.
In that hamlet, neighboring peasants suddenly gathered and were raising furious voices. Each one held crude weapons and, filled with anger, were closing in on the feudal lord's building. It was town with no appreciable defense besides its ramparts. Soldiers that tried to obstruct them were pushed down and violently beaten up.
The townspeople completely startled did not leave their houses. They did not want to get involved.
When the figure of the bewildered feudal lord appeared from the building's terrace, the peasants bitterly screamed.

"""We've paid our taxes like we were told. We complied with repeated demands. And yet, why will you kill us? Do you intend on stealing even our lives?""", they were saying.

The feudal lord didn't understand what they were saying. Sure, he was imposing a harsh tax. He was also requisitioning goods as per orders from the Kingdom and funding the war.
But, there was no order saying to kill. They would not part with their precious labor force for no reason. The peasants were wrung dry, but they had just barely enough to live. If not, then they would no longer have any tax revenue. That was why they would not be killed.

"I don't get what you're saying. But, what you guys have done will not be pardoned. Hurry and break up and return to your work. Any more will be regarded as treachery against the Kingdom, and everyone will be apprehended," he responded.

The peasants did not consent. A genocide was happening at a neighboring farm village right now. Survivors were extremely few. Also, everyone had seen the figures of the Kingdom's soldiers. How could they believe the words of someone that was habitually oppressing them?

Even if he was the feudal lord, it was difficult for him to force the peasants to retire.

Soldiers had been lost at the earlier battle, and the town's guards were few in number. In just numbers, the peasants that had visited for a directly appeal exceeded the guards. The instant when he was thinking how to deceive and pacify them,

From his building flew out a single arrow. That arrow struck the breast of a woman holding a baby in the middle of the crowd. The feudal lord had not given an order to attack. But, an arrow was fired.
Silence enveloped the surroundings, now packed with bloodlust. Then, it instantly exploded.
"Kill him, kill him!" The order came, and the peasants rushed into the feudal lord's building.
Bodies of soldiers were torn by farm tools, and they died. Luxurious furniture and works of arts were all broken. The feudal lord and his family were dragged out and burned alive. The building was set ablaze, and the town of Tenang had been completely occupied by peasants. The weak people who had wrested victory from their depriver through their own hands roared in celebration. When someone shouted "Hooray!", everyone followed afterwards and yelled repeatedly.

—-In the end, the flag flown high, was the flag of the *Royal Capital Liberation Army.*

David fell into a state of panic, hearing that they had lost Tenang behind Belta Castle. At most, it was just a feudal lord being killed by peasants and making a town of the Kingdom fall.
But panicking that their path of retreat had been cut off, "It's preposterous for the likes of peasants to kill the feudal lord. Wipe everyone out," he had arbitrarily issued the order, and sent 2,000 infantry immediately to Tenang.
The peasants put up a good fight, but in the end, they were laymen who had not received training. In not even a few hours, the gate was broken down, and the town was invaded. Everyone who had participated in the rebellion was cut down; it was wholesale slaughter with no heed to young or old, man or woman. There were also townspeople who got mixed in and bit the dust. Everyone suspicious was killed.

News of the "Tenang Rebellion" and the "Tenang Atrocity" spread throughout the Belta area, and many feudal lords trembled in fear of receiving the resentment of the peasants. Many feudal lords who were on the fence, anxious that they would be killed too, declared support for the Liberation Army. Soldiers guarding fortresses also lost their fighting spirit, and they discarded their swords and threw open the gates. Most of them were peasants that had been conscripted from a farming village in this very Belta.

In not even half a month, the Liberation Army had captured the towns and fortresses of Belta, and all that was remaining was Belta Castle. The Kingdom has lost power in the Central Border Zone to that extent. The Fourth Army was further weakened from successive desertion and surrender, and now only a force of 10,000 had to defend the castle.
David had sent a request for reinforcements ASAP to the Royal Capital, but the only response was "Defend Belta to the last." As the Empire in the Northwest was increasing their movements, there were no spare forces left to be sent in aid.
Field Marshal Sharov had appealed that the First Army ought to be sent forth, but Prime Minister Farzam had rejected it, saying it was unnecessary. What ought to take precedence was defence of the Royal Capital, and he would not approve anything that

would weaken it.

At the end of his wits, Sharov decided to dispatch 5,000 of his troops as a rear guard. They made an expedition to Roshanak Stronghold, which amounted to an outpost wall for the Royal Capital area. After Belta fell, it was not unlikely for the Liberation Army for carry on their momentum and close in on the Royal Capital in one go. As well as to gain time, they needed to hold back the Liberation Army there temporarily.
Roshanak was a stronghold in name only. Its walls were low, and it was on low-lying ground. The reshuffled General Yalder was appointed to be the commander. "Do not act rashly and avoid excessive ardor," he was strictly ordered. No voices of opposition were raised from the generals. They thought of him as simply a disposable rock.

On the other side of the map, David at a loss had resolved himself. He would not approve evacuating until the end. Goods continued to be brought into Belta Castle, and they fortified their preparations for a siege. It would be a siege battle with no hope of reinforcements. Before the battle, morale kept on falling.

As for Schera, she had used up all the money provisioned for the siege and bought food in bulk.
Reports that the Liberation Army guys were making an expedition and gradually approaching Belta Castle had come in. Naturally, they could not buy from neighboring towns, as they were no longer under Kingdom rule. As there was no other way, they called the merchants from Alucia River, and had purchased from the smuggling merchants of the Union. They were exploited all the while.
Those guys sold cheap to the their partner, the Liberation Army, and blew up the price for their adversaries, the Kingdom's Army. So that their future customers would think well of them, of course they would do that. They would make up the deficit from their trade partner the Kingdom.
Prices had jumped up to five times their normal value. If you don't like it, don't buy, they had said.
Schera's office room was completely buried by bags of wheat and dried food. At this landscape crowded to the point where one couldn't even find a place to stand, even Katarina was surprised as one would expect.

"With this much, even if the castle's provisions are used up, we can seclude ourselves for a month. We're out of money thanks to this though. How refreshing."

Said Schera while giving the wheat bags a satisfactory smack, as if just saying, "Check it out."
Katarina pushed up her glasses and looked around. It was certainly a good stash, she thought.
—-But.

"Major Schera. Even if the Major is able to seclude herself, we do not have so much."

If it was Schera, even if the castle were to fall for example, she would lock herself in the office alone and would definitely show the will to fight. As long as there was food,

she seemed to be able to fight forever. Katarina had a hope: she wanted to be present in such a situation if possible.
How would Schera welcome her last moments? What kind of face would her dead body have? It was imprudent, but she couldn't say she wasn't interested. Though she too would probably die right after, she would be careful to not die until then, considered Katarina. Would she rise to fame? Would she fall to ruin? Which one it would be was still not clear. All she could do was support this superior officer with all her being. Katarina renewed her determination.

"You don't have to worry. I'll give you your share too. Food tastes better when eaten together right. But, if my cavalry eat, even this amount would soon be gone it seems."

As she was not starving, Schera was still in a good humor.

"My gratitude for the Major's generosity. However, we—-"

"Well, let's think about that after the food's gone, since I feel hungry when I think. Oh yeah, what happened to Second Lieutenant Vander?"

"Sir-, he has completely shut himself in his room. He will not even show his face. His physical condition is poor I heard."

"Oh. That's fine then. I will be going to Staff Officer Sidamo's place after this. You do what you find appropriate. Go rest your body so you don't collapse at a crucial time."

"Understood!"

Schera headed to Sidamo's office room and knocked. Sidamo had been expelled from the position of Chief Staff Officer and was relocated to a staff officer's office. He was given material management duty as per David's order.

"This is Major Schera. You called sir?"

"Enter."

"Excuse me!"

After raising her voice, she opened the door, and there was Sidamo with his grim face. Compared to when she first met him, his face was worn out. He probably had his worries. Schera didn't ask because she didn't care, though. She didn't bring bread today as a present. She had eaten it earlier.

"It's been awhile, Major Schera. As always, I've heard about your style of fighting. You've probably also preserved the honor of General Yalder who recommended you. ……It seems there was no point in giving you adjutants."

"No, their work was extremely helpful."

"Well that's good. I understand now that you're an existence that won't be killed so

easily. Your infamy has also befittingly spread. Death God of the Kingdom, Major Schera Zade. A deplorable female commander that had massacred great numbers of officers, soldiers, and civilians they say. Doesn't it seem like you're being made an enemy by the Rebel Army?"

A black flag with a white bird coat of arms–At the previous Battle of Alucia Crossing, Schera's name had instantly spread. At this current point in time, she had killed the most commanders of the Liberation Army. There was no longer anyone amongst the officers and men of the Liberation Army that did not know of her. She was recognized as the worst enemy that ought to be despised.

"Sir, I killed all those guys of the Rebel Army. Is there any problem?"

"No problem at all. Infamy is an indispensable part of a Hero. If we win, it'll turn the complete opposite. You should behave as you see fit like you are now until the end."

Cynically laughed Sidamo, who then returned to his serious expression.

"Sir. Understood."

"Moving to the main question, unfortunately, this Belta Castle will probably fall. No sight of reinforcements, and even if the enemy surrounds us, we can't stop them. From an objective standpoint, we have one month give or take. There's more or less a source of error though. I fear that there will be an outbreak of a great number of betrayers. How long we can persist, only God knows."

Sidamo disinterestedly announced the fall of the castle. If he were heard by the military police, he would have been restrained. But lying doesn't change anything, so he stated only the truth.
What were important for a siege battle were: Goods, morale of the soldiers, and whether one could expect reinforcements. No matter how superior the defense power of a castle looked, it was worthless if its interior was rotten. In a state where even one was missing, the fall could be said to be a matter of time.
Schera was listening silently. No particular surprise could be seen. She had a face that said she really didn't care at all. Sidamo felt his stomach hurting bit by bit.

"When push comes to shove, you take your soldiers and aim for Roshanak Stronghold. It's meaningless and stupid to have cavalry die inside a castle. The time taken to train them, the money, and the maintenance costs–all of it will be futile. If you're going to die, die outside the castle."

"Sir- I will do my best to die outside the castle!"

Worried that she might not have understood, Sidamo restated it, in a way that even this girl would understand.

"……In simpler terms, don't see the fate of this castle as your fate. Crawl, struggle unseemly until the very end. Consult with your adjutants in detail. That is why they were assigned to you."

"Sir-, I, Major Schera understand!"

"Very well. Dismissed!"

“Excuse me!”

Sidamo watched Schera’s figure leave. As usual, he didn’t know if she was listening to people talking, but he felt the unique drive that brave warriors with long military service had. If he saw Schera’s almost fearsome fighting style, he would have thought that natural. As they had lost the battle, she could say goodbye to a promotion, but by all rights, she should have a medal. That David’s unit was somehow able to escape was due to there being an offensive from Sulawesi Grand Bridge.

Speaking of David, he had wasted away after losing the battle, and it seemed he could no longer stand. His glorious future was shut, and the infamy that he was the perpetrator of the atrocity was thoroughly being spread.
His filthy name would be left in posterity certainly. History was written by the winners.
Sidamo guessed that David planned to die here. If he was going to leave, he would have escaped a long time ago.
He would probably fight proudly until the end like a noble and then die in satisfaction.
Sidamo was thinking like it was someone else’s problem. His body was already on the decline. He was comfortable with that fact. But, he did not intend to die in a place like this. It would be a futile death in that case. He would once again crawl up somehow.
He planned on surviving from Belta at all costs.

(I cannot die yet. There are still things I have do.)

—-Vander, secluded in his office.
Ever since the morning, he had continued to gaze at a single letter.
He was troubled. This would influence the rest of his life. He had to think this through. He put strength in his hands gripping the brush, and slowly wrote a reply.
After the sealing wax dried, after he looked around the area, he left his room.

“……With this, I can no longer go back huh. The one to smile upon me, in the end, will it be a Goddess, or a God of Death?”

Vander muttered to no one in particular, and he recalled the figure of his superior officer. He took a deep sigh, and with his eyes on a certain place inside the castle, he started walking.

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*足下を見る事 Beautiful wordplay by the author. This is an idiom that literally means “to look below one’s foot,” but overall means “to take advantage of.” Similarly, Diener is literally saying that they must not overlook those below them, but he’s insinuating that they must take advantage of them.

**私と共に汚れ役を担ってもらいたい。泥を被り、魂まで血に塗れる汚辱を受けて欲しい I cannot make this sound good for the life of me.

Chapter 16: If Food Were to Fall from the Sky, It Would Surely Be Delicious

Having expanded their war potential, the Royal Capital Liberation Army had gradually set about their strategy to gain total control of Belta. Reshuffling former soldiers of the Kingdom's Army added to their forces, the participating soldiers in this strategy numbered 60,000. 20,000 guards were stationed at Antigua and Salvador. Their support from the citizens was plenty, and now that harvest time was over, goods were in abundance. The long-standing Altura became Supreme Commander and had carried out the encirclement of Belta Castle. She was constantly seen together with the soldiers, and this was also to show that her ideals were not lies.

First, she recommended surrender to David, the commander on the defensive. In exchange for the lives of the castle garrison and civilians, immediately vacate Belta Castle, she said. However, on the condition that only David, the man regarded as the main perpetrator behind the Tenang Atrocity, be put to proper trial.
David refused. He sent a violent hail of arrows in response to the Liberation Army surrounding them. Judging that there was no room for negotiations, Altura stepped forward to give the siege order to the soldiers. She unsheathed her treasured sword from atop horseback and turned its point towards Belta Castle.

"WE ARE RIGHTEOUS! BELTA CASTLE WILL FALL, AND THE HAMMER OF JUSTICE WILL STRIKE THE MAN BEHIND THE MASSACRES, DAVID! KINDRED SOULS OF THE ROYAL CAPITAL LIBERATION ARMY! FOR OUR DREAMS, PLEASE LEND US YOUR STRENGTH!"

"Victory For The Royal Capital Liberation Army!"
"Judgement Onto David!"
"Long Live, Princess Altura! Long Live The Liberation Army!"

The organized Liberation Army soldiers raised up their weapons and shouted in fervor. Their voices were intense enough to shake the heavens and probably circulated as fear inside the castle.

"ARMY, START THE ATTACK! VICTORY TO THE ROYAL CAPITAL LIBERATION ARMY!!"

"ALL UNITS ADVANCE-!! FORWARDDDDDDD-!!"

"CATAPULTS, BEGIN THE ADVANCE-!"

When Altura sent the signal to start the siege, the unit commanders all simultaneously gave their orders to advance. Infantry carrying shields held sandbags and rushed to the moat. As the drawbridge was raised, they first had to make a path. Siege towers would then send in soldiers to the ramparts, and battering rams would then hit the gates. This was the preliminary step to allow those siege weapons to get close. First, they would fill in the moat. Because Belta's moat was both wide and deep with water, they needed a proportionate volume to fill it up.
To halt that, archers on the walls systematically lined up and assiduously shot arrows at the Liberation Army covering the ground like ants.

"DEFEND-! IT'S OVER IF THEY FILL UP THE MOAT! ABSOLUTELY STOP THEM!!"

“B, BUT THE NUMBERS ARE TOO DIFFERENT!”

“DON’T WORRY ABOUT AIMING! JUST SHOOT-! KILL THEM-!”

“DAMN IT-!”

The archers’ commanding officer frantically rebuked the shouting group members. They kept on shooting, and kept on shooting, but the Liberation Army’s numbers were endless. Moreover, the opponents did not keep letting themselves be attacked. Naturally, they were returning the volley from below.
And then the true threat: the catapults being hauled from behind. They originally belonged to the Kingdom’s Army, but at the river battle, they were seized by the Liberation Army. These powerful siege weapons that should have been pointed towards the enemy would be let loose on their own heads. While gazing at the giants rocks that were drawing nearer at a frightening speed, the archers’ commanding officer cursed his own misfortune.

“PREPARE THE CATAPULTS! TARGET: ENEMY’S WEST RAMPART!!”

“CATAPULT PREPARATIONS COMPLETE! TARGETING, ENEMY’S WEST RAMPART!!”

“START THE CATAPULT! FIRE-!!”

Giant stones that were heavier than humans collided with the wall. Stone and wall were smashed, and many archers were blown away.

“HIT CONFIRMED, LOAD THE NEXT SHOT HURRY-!”

Catapults were set up uniformly in front of every castle wall. Their stone supply was maintained due to the efforts of 500 men, and attacks were sporadically fired at the wall and inside the castle. These weapons had problems regarding their accuracy rate and rate of fire, but those weren’t important. That they had a long range and could perform a unilateral attack with no fear of counterattack were their great advantages. It would be fatal if struck by these giant stones, and they flew everywhere, surmounting the castle walls. It would also inflict considerable, psychological burden, and the organization inside the castle could also be expected to be disrupted.
What was thrown were not just stones. Oil, garbage, corpses, Sorcery Mines, anything was fine. It would be great if they got a direct hit on the well, their source of water. The corpses and garbage would also be a source of disease. The besieged side would have no means to defend against that. If the enemy came out from the gates to destroy the catapults, that would be in accordance with the Liberation Army’s expectations.

Fynn was quietly watching the catapult offensive be repeated. As his unit was cavalry at its core, a siege battle was not a place for his activity. He could just pursue fleeing enemies as well as be guards for the catapults. His adjutant, Milla, addressed him.

“So we resorted to force in the end. It would be better if they just obediently opened the gates. There is no meaning in persisting here after all. Is a commander’s final duty not to save the lives of his garrison?”

“General David probably has something he calls honor. Though if it were me I would have immediately surrendered. Spare me the rain of rocks. To be crushed and flattened to death is no joke.”

He muttered while watching a rock sail through the air that was shot alongside an encouraging yell. Fynn had been promoted to Colonel, rewarded for his merit up to here. As he had worked his way up from being a private, he was the most successful man among the Liberation Army.
Though currently it was nothing more than an honorary rank, it could be thought of as a promissory note for future promotions. If Altura became the next Queen, he was already recognized to be the one who would probably carry on the essence of the rebirthed Kingdom. He was young, full of wisdom, and had real achievements. He was gathering enough popularity from the soldiers that he was right after Altura in fame. Fynn conducted himself appropriately too, and he was hailed as a warrior soldier and Hero.

"Colonel Fynn. Will they launch themselves at us do you think?"

"Do I think indeed. As their moat is filled, they are more and more likely to come. In such a case when they run into our firm siege, a hell is waiting, where our troops stationed in ambush slip behind them and cut off their path of retreat. ……I do honestly recommend that they surrender."

"Be that as it may be, because Belta is a solid fortress, our side will have many casualties as well it seems. I believe it would not be unreasonable for starvation tactics here."

It would take time, but if they cut off their supply of goods, Belta would fall without any fighting. Though, due to the supply they had in stock, it would probably take half a year before they would starve and admit defeat.

"Well, our Tactician, Sir Diener, did not think it as up to the task as a planless offensive. It is my guess that he hates conservative plans like starvation. He intends to put on display that we have enough war potential to make a castle capitulate in a short timeframe. …….Of course, I cannot assert that as unconditionally true. It is hard to understand what that man is truly thinking."

The drafted strategies of the Liberation Army were predominantly created through Diener's hands. Altura would agree to it and give the order to implement it. That was it. There were wicked rumors circulating around Diener, and Fynn didn't have trust in him. Fynn didn't think he would turn traitor, but there was no doubt that Diener would calmly throw away the lives of soldiers.
He was different fundamentally from Fynn, who had been drawn by Altura's ideals, and the former general of the Kingdom Behrouz, who hastened to join seeing the misgovernment.

"……Those rumors, are they really true? For example the Rebellion—-"

There was a plausible rumor whispered between the generals–about the Tenang Rebellion being contrived.
There was no proof. But, everyone unanimously agreed that Diener, if it was him, would be quite capable of doing it. Their arrangements for after the Tenang Rebellion and Tenang Atrocity were too quick. That in half a month their sphere of influence had extended this far was all due to Diener's ability. The rumor had jealousy and envy mixed in, but there was no smoke without fire.

Fynn cut Milla short, telling her to be careful with his gaze. It would be troublesome if she was heard by someone.
Diener's proteges, his spies, were scattered everywhere in the Liberation Army. It was to guard against traitors in their midst. Everyone's affiliations, birthplaces, and social positions were different. There were also people who previously earlier were soldiers of the Kingdom. Fynn understood that Diener was vigilant. ……That Diener's vigilance was also near Fynn himself. That man trusted no one except Altura. What spurred Diener on to that extent? Fynn could not even imagine.

"—-Milla. Rumors are rumors to the very end. If one were to launch an accusation, one has to have a myriad of proof and facts. You ought to be careful about uttering suspicions of a Liberation Army comrade in the middle of a battle. There is nothing we have to worry about. We should just work solely for the realization of our ideals."

"S, sir. Please excuse me. I misspoke."

Milla unintentionally stiffened at Fynn's forced smile. His eyes weren't laughing, and they were only focused at his aspirations. Fynn had two sides to him, one as an innocent military man, and one ambitious for future promotion.
His adjutant, Milla, was serving him on top of understand that, but even so, she was pressured by his emitted spirit.

"……This is just me talking to myself, but I believe we do not have to do anything. There is only one fate for those who have sold their soul to the devil. He will surely not be able to escape from his doings. Death will simply devour him to his very soul, and he will be perpetually tormented in eternal purgatory."

Fynn recalled the face of the Death God while muttering in a small voice–that female commander that he had once driven away. At Sulawesi Grand Bridge, her cavalry unit had killed a veteran army general, an acquaintance of his, and rampaged as they pleased. Most likely, she was still alive. *That* would not die so simply. She was probably sharpening her scythe in Belta Castle even now, waiting for an opportunity to prey upon them.
Fynn prayed for her to hurry up and die, before that scythe would reach his own neck.

—-Belta Castle, South-side Wall.
Stones continued to be thrown, and while showered by an intense volley of arrows, Schera was commanding an archer unit. Cavalry obviously had no role to play inside a castle, so everyone had dismounted and taken up bows.
Katarina was unabashedly exhibiting her proficiency in archery that she had engraved onto her body through training. Vander had also finally returned to his normal self and was commanding the soldiers.
Back to speaking of Schera, because she had never used a bow before, she was lining up small sickles that she had bought in advance from the town inside the castle. There were 100 in total. It would not be an exaggeration to say that she had bought all that there were. As for the money, it was borrowed from Katarina since Schera had already used all of hers up.

"……Major? What in the world are you planning to do with those sickles?"

Asked Vander with a quizzical expression, and Schera answered him with naked murderous intent.

"Want to know? This-!"

She threw it with absurd force that there was recoil. It stabbed between the eyebrows of a soldier who had gotten into the mood and was frolicking beside the catapult. Seeing their comrade fall down, the soldiers panicked. Schera threw in rapid succession. Seeing the sickles as if homing onto them strike the vitals of the soldiers, Vander's breath caught in his throat.

"……Monstrous as always. What kind of brute strength is that?"

"But there aren't many left you know. Once they're gone, I'll just be throwing rocks."

She threw a fist-sized rock at a soldier holding up a shield beside the moat under the ramparts. During that time too, an arrow grazed Schera's side, but she was absolutely heedless to it. The rock scored a direct hit on the helmet, and the soldier fainted. Schera thought it was regrettable that she couldn't confirm if he died.

"How long can this hold out? This castle. It seems though that the moat will be filled in after 3 days or so. What will become of us do you think?"

Muttered Vander while surveying the Liberation Army surrounding Belta Castle. Until the moat was filled with sandbags, they would probably continue delaying like they were now. Once the moat was filled, it would be the all the more dangerous. The siege towers for getting soldiers on the walls would be unleashed. Then, if the castle gates were broken down, there would be a melee inside the castle. That happening would be the same as the castle falling. The enemy soldiers would endlessly rush in.

Schera glared at Vander, who decided to sigh.

"Don't think about extraneous things; think about killing even one more trash of the Liberation Army. Second Lieutenant Vander, your hands haven't moved since awhile ago. Is your condition still poor? Or maybe you're just thinking of something I wonder? You don't have to hold back. Tell me at once."

Like she was peering into his innermost thoughts, Schera stared into Vander's eyes. Vander felt chills down his spine at the sharpness of Death's intuition. He had to immediately deny it. Otherwise he would be killed.

"Please I beg your pardon! There is absolutely nothing wrong with my condition!"

"Then hurry and kill. There are enemies in swarms. Starting from the guys you don't fancy, Kill!"

Schera kept on throwing rocks while shouting. A good many were crushing the faces of enemy soldiers. There were also times when body and shield were blasted away. Seeing their commander's strenuous effort, the cavalrymen who had switched to bows also roused themselves.

"Don't fall behind Major Schera! Bows ready-!!"

A cavalryman who had experience with bows had taken command in place of Schera.

Schera was occupied throwing rocks.

"Ou-!"

"—-Volley, Fire-!!"

All the arrows were simultaneously fired. Like rain they deluged onto the Liberation Army soldiers, raising screams and sprays of blood.

One beat too late, Vander pulled back his arrow, and released.
Katarina was observing Vander's behavior from the side. She held suspicions that *he was probably*, but she did not say anything. He still hadn't done anything. However, there was need for precaution.

When the sun began to set, horns echoed, and the Liberation Army was backing off. It seemed today's siege was over. The catapults were also moved back outside of weapon range.
But, the defending side had to constantly be vigilant. There was also the possibility they would wake up early and find their moat being filled. There was also the consideration that a construction unit would put up rope ladders and scale the walls. They absolutely could not take their eyes off of the Liberation Army's movements. A siege battle was a clash of stamina and willpower. They would have no choice but to rest their bodies while paying attention to lookout at night.

The flames of torches lit the Liberation Army's camp and completely covered the perimeter of Belta Castle. At the same time it was to guard against a night attack, it was also to demonstrate their own power.

These lights were arrayed in a way that seemed to surround a coffin; a coffin that was being filled, bit by bit, by their hands.
It was as if the Liberation Army was giving them a burial, Schera thought. Here was her third home. First was her poor village, next was Antigua, then this Belta. Would she be chased out again, at the hands of the Liberation Army scum?
Or would she die here maybe? She couldn't die yet. Still, still not enough. Schera took off her helmet, leaned against the wall, and silently took a breath. She tucked back her sweat-stained brown hair. She took off her gauntlets and rested.

—-She was hungry.
It would be nice if not rocks but food were to fall from the sky. Everyone would surely be happy then.

Belta Castle, David's Office.
David had assembled the staff officers and opened a war council. With this, they had lost count of how many pointless war councils they had. David with an utterly worn out face was sitting in his seat.
Next to him stood the ex-military officer Staff Officer propping up David's weakened body.

"……Reinforcements? Have the reinforcements not come yet? Hurry them. If they don't hurry, Belta will fall."

“Your Excellency. We can no longer send out messengers from this castle. It is impossible for even a mouse to escape.”

The Chief Staff Officer plainly told the truth. Not a single released messenger had returned. There was no way they could return.

“Why won’t they send reinforcements-! Despite that if Belta falls, the Royal Capital will be in jeopardy-! That garbage Farzam is crumpling up the reports I bet! That nothing but incompetent upstart who only kisses ass-!!”

Agitated, David shouted in anger, and then painfully coughed.

“Your Excellency David. Getting excited will harm your body.”

“Indeed. Without His Excellency David, this castle will not even last a day. Please take care of yourself.”

“In such a situation, no matter what it takes, we need to get in contact with the Royal Capital. If we strike an opening, surely we should be able to do something. I do not doubt it.”

“Umu. The enemy is just a mishmosh, and the garrison’s morale is booming. If we pincer them from inside and outside, we can definitely win.”

The staff officers spit words contrary to their true feelings. It now no longer required confirmation–Belta had been forsaken. Reinforcements from the Royal Capital would absolutely not come. While everyone was making a show of caring about David, they would afterward consider their own future plans. They were surrounded by a large army of 60,000, stones rained on them, and the moat was in the process of being filled.
The castle would doubtlessly fall. If they stayed as they were, they would share the same offense as David, as partners in crime for the Atrocity.
—-There was still time. If they defected, they could probably still distinguish themselves.
If they could get a guarantee for their own social status and rank, they wouldn’t particularly mind the Liberation Army. Deeds that would be leverage: throwing open the gates, burning the food, and then, David’s head.
Implementation would require their own troops. They had to lay the groundwork to gain the cooperation of the generals. It would be a race against time. It would be futile if someone else betrayed first.
Except the Chief Staff Officer and the ex-military officer Staff Officer, not one man had the intention of dying alongside David.

“……Today’s war council will conclude. Gentlemen you are dismissed. Good work.”

“Sir-, excuse us.”

David too was a noble who had fought in a factional dispute to the end and ascended to his position now. Understanding the workings of those men’s hearts was like taking candy from a baby. He did not plan on letting a single one escape. He would take them to hell too. When the staff officers that had been of David’s clique departed, he addressed the ex-military officer Staff Officer, Konrad.

"……Konrad. As of today, you are released from your duties as Staff Officer, and will be restored to Military Officer. I will instruct you in matters hereafter in due course. Until then, lead the military police and patrol each and every gate and provisions warehouse. No mercy to those taking suspicious actions. No matter who they are, execute them."

"Sir-, understood."

Major Konrad saluted. As a pure military man, he personally did not understand difficult matters. He would simply just follow his superior's orders. After all this time, he had no intention of grovelling to live.

"……Chief Staff Officer. This is how it'll be. Your burdens will increase, sorry, and please."

"Understood. Your Excellency and I will share the same fate. I will follow you until the end."

He had staked everything on David. If they were to be defeated right now, he had made the resolve to accept that return. After all he had been through, he had no plans of switching to the winning horse.

"…..Sorry, but let me rest, just a bit. Hmph, I didn't expect that I would have fallen so low. No matter how tall the tower, it takes just an instant to collapse. I can't make fun of Sidamo like this."

While receiving support from Konrad, David returned to his room. His glory had fallen and scattered from his hands. In exchange, he had obtained notoriety that would be remain for generations to come. A heretical noble who massacred civilians. How would he meet his end?
He couldn't help but laugh. If he was going down, he would have his betrayers meet the same fate. He had heard that the dead tried to drag down the living. In that case, shouldn't he too emulate that? Fortunately for him, there existed a person under his command suitable for that role.

"……Death God, huh?"

"Your Excellency David?"

"……No, nothing."

The scythe brushed his own neck, he felt. He felt the monster impatiently, restlessly waiting for that time to reap it. Its figure was of Schera Zade.

Chapter 17: More than Pretty Medals, I Want Food That's Delicious

Liberation Army Campground, Front Line.
The generals' morale was soaring, and everyone galvanized themselves, saying tomorrow would be the day they bring down Belta.
Diener estimated that the siege operation would end after one week.
If they ignored casualties and sieged zealously day and night, it might even fall immediately, he thought, but there was no need to push themselves. Now that they'd come this far, even if he erred at the very end, it would not change anything.
The moat was being filled in while the catapults were backing the infantry. Then, once they were able to use the siege towers and battering rams, they would instantly have superiority.
With no sign that enemy reinforcements were coming right now, they were incessantly only making a frontal attack. It would pressure the enemy soldiers' wills, bring out internal collapse, and make them open the gates from the inside. Now that they succeeding in converting numerous traitors, the surrender of the castle was only a matter of time.

"Sir Diener, seems the siege operation is progressing as you firstly planned. Our subordinates are also rising in energy."

The veteran general Behrouz greeted Diener. Excelling at clever tactics, Behrouz was the center of all the Liberation Army generals.

"Mmm. Everything is according to keikaku.* In the not so distant future, maybe, the doors will be thrown open."

Belta Castle shown on the map… was completely surrounded by Liberation Army pieces from all four sides.

"Afterwards, we just have to pay attention for a desperate attack from the enemy. What the cornered enemy will do, we do not know. We have to keep sustained surveillance."

"That is true however. In a little while, I plan on weakening just one place in our encirclement. If we venture to show an opening, we will lure out the enemy."

The pieces arranged on the eastern side were pulled back.

"I see. You intend on deploying ambush troops to their path of retreat. Even if they know, the enemy planning to escape will have to take their chances. Staying is just waiting to be destroyed."

"……Here, I plan on killing the rumored Death God. Because she has steadily become a dangerous existence, even if I have to resort to force, I will have her leave the castle. That cavalry unit will definitely plan to escape at the fall of the castle. On their path of retreat, they may conceal themselves and march, but there is a perfect woodlands area. They should be passing through it. I will accost them there."

He guided with his hand to be understood; he hit that hand. He would lay an ambush for the soldiers on their path of retreat, and kill in one fell swoop the defenseless cavalry that could only progress forwards. The enemy would doubtlessly move at night. Their field of vision would be obscured, and they would not notice the troops in ambush. No matter how stalwart she may be according to the rumors, she was limited to being human. If he crushed her with numbers, he could undeniably kill her. No matter what kind of Hero she was.

"Death God. Going by the name of, Schera Zade, if I recall. A daring and resolute, young, female general I heard. I would love to see her once."

Behrouz jokingly played around.
However, his eyes weren't laughing. Many of his colleagues had been killed, and he was inwardly grinding his teeth. Losing Borjek and Voleur was painful. As officers with a plethora of experiences, they carried the important role of guiding the next generation. That Death God, had simply clipped that away.

"While unfortunate, that opportunity may never visit you I believe. I will have the Death God urgently return home to her former world. The perishing Kingdom doesn't need something like a Hero."

Diener declared, and he sent his gaze towards Belta Castle.
The severe hail of stones were continuing even now. The enemy's counterattacks were gradually dropping in severity.
—-Everything was going well.

Six days passed since the start of the siege. As usual, reinforcements hadn't come. The moat was being filled up hour by hour.
Belta Castle, under such a hopeless situation, VIP Room.
Schera had received an invitation from David and was festively enjoying an extravagant, fancy dinner. It was thanks for undertaking a certain duty for him, and to show that he valued her labor the other day. When he asked her what she wanted, she had unashamedly responded, delicious food.
David who had no appetite was watching the female commissioned officer consuming the meal before his eyes and unintentionally, wryly smiled.

"Major Schera, is it delicious?"

"Yes. Tasty."

She responded without raising her face. She was not wearing her armor or gauntlets right now. Though, her weapon was left under her.

"That so. That's good. It's something our finest chef made. You should slowly taste it."

"Sir-! Understood."

"It's fine if you don't talk while eating. You calm down and eat."

She nodded, and cut the meat using the knife. It was the meat of the rare Cologne cow taken from the Kingdom's northwest region. Food made using it was something commoners could never even dream of eating.
While tasting the trickling blood sauce, Schera's was throwing steak into her flapping mouth. In addition, things like fruit taken from the Union and Empire-brand wine were laid out. It was, so to speak, a dinner table of high class nobility. Schera was insatiably wolfing everything down.
This little girl who looked to be the same age as his own daughter did not at all appear to him as a feared Death God.
David was gazing at this supper scene with profound interest.

—-There, the latest intruder barged in.
It was a man of nobility leading ten of his own troops. He was a human who curried favor with David and had the position of Staff Officer.
Triumphantly pointing his unsheathed sword, he had a vulgar smile. Schera paid him no mind and continued eating. From their perspective, they could only see her small back.

"I wondered who it was; if it isn't Staff Officer Asar. How rare of you to hold something like a sword, what happened?"

David asked with blank eyes, and the man called Asar snorted.

"Hmph, that's evident. I'll surrender to the Liberation Army and present Your Excellency's head. Princess Altura was originally connected to the Royal Family. Going to serve her has no demerits."

"And so you came all the way over here? I've truly troubled you."

David tipped the wine bottle. Schera stabbed a fruit using her fork. The fruit was green with a vascular pattern, and it had been cut it into uniform, perfectly-sized pieces. It was really sweet when eaten.

"How unlike you, Your Excellency. For this little girl from God knows where to be shown this amount of compassion. As the perpetrator behind the Tenang Atrocity, you have to behave so until the end for me."

Asar gave the signal, and a soldier approached the table.

"Yo, this ain't the situation to be carefreely eating-!"

After strong poking Schera's head, he overbearingly pulled out the tablecloth. The tidily arranged silverware, as well as the food, fell and scattered on the group. The wine bottles broke, and the liquids streamed to Schera's feet. In Schera's hands were left only a fork and knife.

"I was made extremely despondent by you, Your Excellency David. I had, risking my own life, served you up until here because I was sure that would be walking the road to success. There is no value in a ruined noble. Nevertheless, your head still has value I heard. Therefore, as consolation for serving you until now, I have come asking for such. If you can sympathize, Sir David, will you submit that head to me, without any pointless resistance?"

Joked Asar, making a motion cutting his own neck. Up until gathering his own troops, he thought he had been slow, but his target was still lingering, and he was relieved. He had been worried that those other guys had gone ahead of him
But, that was needless anxiety. The other staff officers also unexpectedly had their hands full it seemed. In that case, he wouldn't hold back, and he, Asar, would claim his prize. He would instruct his soldiers to 'Kill.' After that was done with, he would have to open the gates and get inside the Liberation Army. There was still work to be done, as there were in no small numbers fellows who would devote themselves to the Kingdom until the end.

"Sir Asar. What do we do about this little girl? She would be a setback, so can I kill her?"

That one soldier gripped Schera's slightly shivering hair. She was quaking in fear it seemed. It aroused the soldier's sadistic heart.

"It seems like His Excellency favors her. We was probably lonely all by himself. Blast 'em both off."

"—-Sir-! Yo, you heard eh? He said I could kill ya. Hehe, what kinda face will ya die with—-na-!!"

This moment the soldier's face drew near, Schera turned and drilled the knife into his face and gouged deeply. Not caring how much he struggled, she stabbed, over, and over again. Grisly howls echoed throughout the room.

"hey… my food has become a mess thanks to you. hey, you listening?"

Basking in the blood spray, Schera asked close to his ears. Because he was doing nothing but screaming, she rammed the fork into the crown of his head and threw him at the wall. After a light, mushy sound, the room finally became silent. David, rubbing his beard in exasperation, had also gotten embroiled and was spattered with blood.

"W, what's with you-! N, no wait. Y, you're Major Schera?!?"

"That's right. It's over with you it appears. I was ordered to by His Excellency David you know. He told me to deal with the scum who decided to betray the Kingdom. As thanks, he served me this meal."

She picked up a piece of meat that had fallen to the ground, and ate it. The meat juices poured out inside her mouth, and then, a rich, iron taste.

"It's De-death God Schera. Hey, I didn't hear about this! Whaddya mean this guy hates bodyguards! You shitty noble-! Ain't this different from what you said!!?"

Indignant, a commanding officer-like man shouted. He knew of Schera's strength. He had been in David's unit on the retreat. They surely could not win. Terror coursed through him just by confronting her.
Before he was seized by Death, he had to escape. Immediately.

"S, Silence! Do you know who you are questioning!! Anyway, our opponent is alone. Surround and kill her-!"

“Ya retard-! You can say that crap cause ya dunno her strength! Even if we had a hundred we couldn’t win. Ain’t no way we can win against a monster-! Screw this, I’m out. Yo, we’re leavin’ quickly.”

“C, commanding officer, please wait for us-!”

The soldiers were scrambling to leave the room. Despite them defecting to survive, Death lying in wait was nothing to sneeze at. Life over merit. This was a shared thought for them.

“Wait! Hey! You disobeying my orders-!!? I said to wait!”

He went to run after them, when something was thrown at his back. His posture destroyed, he fell to his knees on the floor, and his eyes met that something: it was a staff officer, who had been his colleague until a while ago. Also, an opponent that he was fiercely competing against for promotions in David’s clique.

“Hi, hiiii-!”

“Staff Officer Asar. You were the slowest you know. Others had come even earlier. I didn’t expect you to do the same overused actions and achieve the same result though. You actually disappointed me. Come, take a look. The end of the betrayers.”

David stood up and kicked numerous spheres that were hidden under the table. Seeing them, Asar soiled himself from unmeasurable fear. They were human heads.

Schera grabbed her scythe left on the floor and started walking to Asar–while cracking her neck, very irritated.

“Wa, wait please. S, spare me. If it’s money I can give it. Major Schera, I beg you-! Oh, yeah, kill David, not me! And together to the Liberation Army—-”

“Go together to the Liberation Army you say? Ahaha-, what amusing things you say. Well then, since I was able to hear an interesting chat, I guess it’s about time?”

She smiled with a blood-smeared face, aimed for the bawling Asar, and swung it down. David nodded, seemingly satisfied, and gulped down his wine that had something red mixed in.

“Major Schera. My apologies troubling you. ……Also, I’m going to apologize for my rash remarks before. Just like this, I apologize.

David lowered his head. Schera was watching him with no strong feelings in particular.

“You, escape from this castle. Sidamo has also requested you to do so. I dare say that the moat will be filled in tomorrow. If that happens, we won’t be able to hold out.”

“Sir-, understood.”

“I will remain here, but I plan on making an escape with the soldiers that can move. Command has been entrusted to Major Konrad. The plan will include both you and him. Carry it out tomorrow night.”

“I, Major Schera, understand!”

“Dismissed. May the fortunes of war be with you.”

Schera saluted, swung the blood off her scythe, and departed. In the room where the smell of blood permeated, David closed his eyes for a short while.

—-Next day.
The moat was completely filled. The real siege would begin.

“SIEGE TOWERS BEGIN THE ADVANCE-! SHOOT DOWN THE ENEMY ARCHERS!!”

The siege towers advanced until point black range of Belta Castle and started a furious assault.

“Draw bowss-!! Fire-!!”

From inside the tower while hiding their bodies, they started shooting at the rampart archers. Having lost the high ground advantage, the soldiers of the Kingdom were dying one by one. Still, they could not take refuge. If they descended from the castle walls, the siege towers would send out planks. Infantry would break in from there in succession. They wouldn’t be able to stop them if that happened. Hence, they absolutely had to defend the castle walls to the death.

The besieged side not only had to pay attention to the siege towers, but also to below them. There was also the possibility of the enemy setting up rope ladders and scaling the walls by force. There was further need to concentrate fire so the gates wouldn’t be broken by battering rams.

“ABSOLUTELY DON’T LET THEM BREAK THROUGH! DON’T HAND OVER BELTA TO THE REBEL ARMY-!! SHOW THEM THE TENACITY OF THE FOURTH ARMY-!!”

The garrison commander’s voice rang in vain. The spirit of the defenders was already on the verge of collapse. In such situations, there were cases where the soldiers roused themselves from the commander’s sternness.
But, that would be difficult due to the ex-noble David. More important than anything, was that he had not once come out from the main building. There was no way morale would rise.

Schera had entrusted the job of commander to Katarina, and she was discussing with Major Konrad. It was concerning the escape plan that would be executed this evening. Konrad was the very picture of a boorish man, and he spoke nothing but what was needed.

“Major Schera. I’m Konrad, newly appointed to commander of the Fourth Army. As for the plan, we’ll carry it out at the same time the day changes this evening. As far as I can see from up high, it appears the encirclement of the east gate is thin. Accordingly, we’ll break through from the east gate and aim for Roshanak Stronghold

of the Canaan Area."

Interposed between the Belta Area and the Royal Capital Area was the Canaan Area. It was surrounded by steep mountains, and one had to pass this Canaan to reach the Royal Capital. After traversing the single, plying main road, the expansive Great Plains stretched out, and in its center stood the Royal Capital Blanca.
Canaan itself was a barren land, and agriculture could not be expected from it. As it had no special industry to speak of, it was a poor area with a low population. Even if one attacked it, there would be no benefit. However, one had to pass through if aiming for the Royal Capital.

"And so, what should my cavalry do I wonder?"

As Konrad was of the same rank as her, Schera stopped with the tiring formalities. She was swinging her feet while chewing beans. Konrad didn't particularly care.

"Stand as the vanguard, or be the rear guard. Either way, it'll probably be a harsh battle. I'll go with whatever's left. I don't care which."

If they were to make the best of their mobility, it would be correct to be the vanguard and instantly dash away, but regrettably, the enemy would for a fact be waiting for them. Due to ambushing soldiers, casualties might be enormous.
Then, as for if they were to leave as the rear guard, that would be another hell, since there was a high chance of being surrounded by reinforcements from the north and south. It would be the end for them if they stopped moving, and they would definitely be annihilated. It goes without saying that the rear guard had a very high probability of dying.

"Then shall we decide it like this? I'm fine with either."

Either way, she would do nothing but pummel the Liberation Army. What she would do wouldn't change. On one of the beans in her hand, she drew and 'x' mark with her nail. Another one was left unmarked. After mixing them around, she took one in each hand, and held them out to Konrad.

"……The heck."

"The one with the x is the vanguard. Your luck will be tested. Good luck."

Entertained, Schera brightly smiled, and presented two separate fates.

The sun set, and the Liberation Army withdrew their soldiers. No assertive offense came. Most likely, that they planned to escape had been seen through. The Liberation Army did not want to waste soldiers it seemed.
Dazzlingly casting light, the torches began to swathe the silent Belta Castle. The final night had come. Looking over the surroundings from the intensely damaged castle wall, the torches on the east side did look lacking. Beyond them were woodlands, and a road that continued to Canaan. It would be a thorny path.

Under Konrad and Schera's command, 5,000 soldiers of Belta Castle were gathered.

With injured but able to move as the minimum, this amount was all that could be gathered. People who did not feel like escaping remained inside the castle.
The Fourth Army that boasted of its majesty was now a shadow of its former self. There were now no other soldiers besides these that could move. As soon as the escape was successful, the ones that couldn't planned to open the gates and surrender.
David had strongly refused to escape, and he remained alone in the main building. The Chief Staff Officer took it upon himself to burn important documents. He threw all their past glory into the fireplace, and in the end he would probably take poison.

Konrad sent Schera the signal. Schera raised her scythe in response. Someone could be heard gulping. If they were to run, this was their last chance. They absolutely must not stop.

—-But, at that time, an explosion roared inside the castle. From the main building, tendrils of flame began rising.
Except the East Gate, all the gates were thrown open, and the Liberation Army that was tired of waiting flooded inside. It seemed a turncoat did this. There was no other timing to earn achievements than this.

"—-Open the castle gates-!!"

Konrad roared from on top his horse, and the final gate was opened.

"Konrad's Unit, begin the advance-! All members charge! Forwarddddddd-!!"

"OU-!!"

Infantry raising the flag of the Fourth Army began the charge. Each and everyone was fatigued. There were people who soon planned on throwing down their swords and deserting in the other direction. From the East Gate, everyone had different thoughts, and they scattered in every direction. Command had already disappeared.
The ones following Konrad's directions were merely 1,000 men. It was the unit directly under him that he had been leading way before. That they somehow maintained their morale was Konrad's skill. With their commander leading, they decisively charged, aiming for the woodlands..

Schera saw off that unshapely procession. Her cavalry did not leave at the same time. Schera had a sudden premonition, and for some reason had stopped.

"Major, will we not be going?"

The cavalryman with archery experience asked composedly. Schera's Cavalry, under their black flag with white crow, maintained high morale. They numbered 2,300. The somewhat smaller number was due to deaths during the siege. Schera thought that the deaths of her comrades was very unfortunate. That the people who would eat a meal together with her decreased, definitely made her feel lonely. But, that was war after all; it was inevitable. Schera ate the portions they would've eaten.

"It's about time, shall we go? It's gotten considerably brighter."

Flames blazed fiercely from the main building inside the castle, the place where David was. Tendrils of flames rose from every caste gate. There was now nothing anyone could do; Belta had fallen.
Katarina reported.

“Major. As I thought, Second Lieutenant Vander is not here. I fear that, no, I am certain that he was the turncoat. Will we weed him out and deal with him? If you will it, I will absolutely kill him.”

“Let’s leave that for next time. There are other things were must do right now.”

“Sir-!”

Schera held out the scythe that was perched on her shoulder sideways. They would sortie.

“Then, are we going too?”

Asked one cavalryman, and Schera nodded. The cavalry members lowered the visors of their helmets. Schera did not like the heavy helmets that they were wearing. Not heeding her group members’ warnings, she equipped a lighter made one that she liked.

“Major Schera, your orders.”

Prompted Katarina, pushing up her glasses. In her hand was her ready cane.

“—-Schera’s Cavalry, will change course-!! Follow after me-!!”

“Follow Major Schera-!! Raise the flags-!!”

“OU-!!”

Kicking her horse, Schera dashed forward. The cavalry raised their spears equipped with the battleflag and orderly raced after her. Enemy soldiers in high spirits, not expecting there to be enemies, were trampled to death by horses, and mowed down by spears.
Into the darkness, white crows were unleashed.

A dogged pursuit of the Liberation Army had begun. Konrad’s soldiers were falling by the wayside, starting first from the people with no stamina, and they were dying at the hands of enemy soldiers. They slipped through the enemy’s offensive, and finally took refuge in the forest. Then, arrows were shot at them.

“I knew there would be an ambush-! Don’t confront them, keep running!”

“B, but! There are enemy soldiers everywhere-!!”

“Concentrate attack on one area! There should absolutely be an opening-!”

Konrad earnestly gave his orders. In the middle of doing so too, he was knocking

down arrows while swinging his sword.
Would there really be something like an opening? Wasn't this a dead end? Uneasiness was eroding him. Despite their numbers dwindling, Konrad's unit continued the hard fight.

"Don't let a single one escape! Massacre the Kingdom's soldiers-!!"

"If we take the enemy commander's head, we'll get a bounty! They absolutely aren't getting away-!"

"If it's the rumored Death God, we're promised a huge bounty, and a promotion to a general! We have to kill them, and avenge our fallen comrades!!"

They pursued the cavalry running in front of them. Their opponents were frantically running away, and a counterattack wouldn't come. There was no battle this easy. Victory was assured. They chased after the enemy soldiers while their mouths bent cruelly. They would kill them, take their heads, and earn achievements.

—-That instant. The enemy cavalry faced them out of nowhere.
They had suddenly dropped their speed and turned their horses. Confused at what was going on, the pursuers halted.
Aiming for that lull, a rider wielding a scythe instantly assaulted them.

"It's S, Schera. The Death God is—-"

The scythe bit into the throat of the shouting soldier at the front. His body itself was raised up. From his mouth came an unreal scream, and his limbs convulsed back and forth. Just how much intense pain was assailing him? The surrounding soldiers couldn't even begin to describe it. After cheerfully, easily waving him around, she ripped him off, and licked her lips.
Death searched for its next prey, prowling, and pounced. It swung its scythe in all directions, and blood began to gush in tandem with its swings. Afterwards, the coordinated cavalry trampled the Liberation Army infantry that had been in pursuit.

"What are you doing-! The enemy is in the middle of retreat-! Spread out and surround them, Surround Them-!"

A heroic rider went to attack, but he was split from his head by a single blow. Helmet, armor, even the horse, was bisected vertically. Another man no longer had an upper body. The horse with the lower body on it began to wander about, as if looking for its master.

"Hi, hiiii-!"

"Next one won't come? Anyone's fine. Hurry, come at me!"

"Get her-! Exhaust her!"

"Permission to use bows! We can bring her down if we concentrate fire!"

"No! Do you want to friendly fire-!?"

Bows weren't useful. They were too close. Stray arrows would hit their encircling allies.

Seeing that the pursuers had stayed their hand, Schera's Cavalry began to change course again.
Marching at a deliberate speed that just begged to be attacked, the infantry would surround them again, and then a massacre would start.
Every time, the number of dead bodies increased. Perhaps they were seized with fear seeing this calamity, reinforcements didn't come. No one wanted to do something like stand before Death. All the more as the battle had been won.

"—-E, enough. Any more is pointless. We'll leave them to the guys in front-"
"Ha- ha. M, monster-!"
"Shit-! We weren't told about dealing with the Death God-!"

After three massacres were repeated, the pursuit unit gave up. This was a battle they had won, why did they have to die? Why were they the only ones who had to face against this kind of monster? They helplessly watched white crows race into the woodlands.

"Major Schera-! Ahead of us in the woodlands, Konrad's unit is in combat!"

"It seems they were ambushed. Well then, we shall hit them in the flanks. It's a bit dark, so I guess we have to brighten it up. Katarina-!!"

Schera decided their objective while taking a stance with her scythe. On its blade was skewered a pitiful corpse of an enemy soldier.
Katarina sent magic power into that corpse using necromancy.

"I am ready whenever-!"

"—-Alright, take this-!"

Tensing up, she hurled the corpse. The corpse was thrown into a thicket, where it seemed ambushers were concealed.
Katarina snapped her fingers, and the corpse exploded, setting the thicket on fire. The surprised ambushers hastily jumped out, whereupon Schera's Cavalry stormed and crushed them.

"Katarina-! Next-!"

"Please leave it to me-!"

Schera had obtained many sacrifices. She was picking them out from the pile at her feet and lobbing them one after another.
Each time Katarina snapped her fingers, a tremendous explosion would thunder, and enemy soldiers were scorched. Each time, there would be screams and torn-off limbs flying in the air.

"—-My Cavalry, charge-! Kill them-!"

The cavalry unit began faithfully charging as per Schera's order. Thrusted spears from the shadows skewered several cavalrymen. The skewered riders though vomiting

blood still plunged into the mass of enemies.
“Kill the enemy.” Schera’s orders were absolute. Until they ceased to breathe, they would continue to kill. Even if five spears pierced their torsos, the cavalry continued to battle. They drove forward while pierced, and cut off the heads of enemy infantry before their eyes.
—-Then, they died while laughing.

“Major-! Enemy troops from behind us! Their numbers are 1,000!”

“Kill all of them-! Katarina, you take half and go ahead! Meet up with Konrad! Be brave and plunge through the fire! Come with me afterward-!! We will kill all of them entirely-!!”

She threw a corpse, and it exploded. The woodlands bursted into red flames. The ambushers escaped outside, unable to bear it.

“Sir-! Second Lieutenant Katarina, will advance forward!”

Katarina and the cavalrymen as instructed marched into the fire. Seeing them gone, Schera turned around and confronted the pursuit unit. A man who seemed to be the enemy’s commander postured with his sword and spoke up.

“Quietly surrender-! You can’t escape anymore! Throw down your swords and dismount-! Immediately!”

Behind Schera blazed evil fires of hell. The black flag was brilliantly illuminated by the flames’ brightness.
While baring its teeth, Death smiled ferociously. Next to her, the cavalrymen raised their spears and formed ranks.

“My cavalry will continue to fight even when dead. Of course I will too. Right, what do you say?”

“LONG LIVE SCHERA’S CAVALRY-! VICTORY TO MAJOR SCHERA-!”

All members brandished the battleflags even higher and chanted in unison. Seeing that bizarre spectacle, the pursuit soldiers stopped in their tracks.
There was something uncanny about these guys. Right, they were like soldiers who had resolved themselves to die.** They weren’t afraid of dying. Therefore, they resented the living, and would drag them to hell. Fighting against the the dying, repulsive. The pursuers didn’t want to die in this kind of place.
The soldiers’ hands were shaking, the Platoon Leader’s included. The trembling of their bodies wouldn’t stop. Oh why did come to chase these guys? They cursed their own misfortune.

“Very well-! Then we will not lose! Even if the Kingdom’s Army is defeated, I will continue to win! I’ll make you scum know your place-!”

“DEATH TO THE FILTH! DEATH TO THE REBEL ARMY-!!”

“G, Go away!”
“They’re M-monsters-!! These guys are monsters-!!”
“It’s Death, Death is coming!! R, Run!!”

The pursuit unit that had been vastly superior was utterly demoralized, and they began to flee, fallen into a state of panic. From behind, the cavalry unit began to overrun them. The flags of the Liberation Army were trampled, and spears pierced into the back of soldiers' heads.
A one-sided counterattack was beginning.

In the captured Belta Caste, sensing that there was a disaster, Diener had sent out the soldiers deployed to the north and south as a pursuit unit. Through pressure from overwhelming numbers, they had finally driven Schera and the others into the woodlands…while sustaining countless numbers of casualties. With this many sacrifices, it really didn't seem like a mopping-up operation. There was no strategy. Through overwhelming violence, every pursuit was being repelled.

Diener recognized that he had misjudged Schera's power, and thereupon, he was even more convinced that they had to kill her here.

"Kill the Death God-! She'll be a source of evil if she gets away here! Make sure to kill her-!"

"S, sir Diener, please calm down!"

Diener's follower restrained him. The nearby generals too were in mute amazement at this unfamiliar side of Diener.

"What is that!? Don't screw with me-! I won't recognize something like that-! I can't recognize something like that-!"

"Sir Diener, calm down. Belta Castle has already fallen. Is this not according to your plan?"

Diener didn't lend an ear to Behrouz either.

"That cannot be left alive! If that gets away here, even more blood of the Liberation Army be shed-!"

When he thought they would withdraw while making the best use of cavalry's mobility, they charged at him. Furthermore, it was a thoughtless method of attack with no regard to their own deaths. He would not accept such a method of fighting. He could not accept it. That's why he necessarily would kill it here. The Liberation Army was Diener's everything. Schera killing them like worms could not be left alive.

"Send in Fynn's Lion Cavalry-! Strictly order him to unconditionally kill that thing!"

"Y, your will be done!"

The messenger ran away hastily.
While biting his nails, Diener continued with bloodshot eyes to look down on Death's forces.

Katarina had linked up with Konrad's unit. Schera was toying with the Liberation Army while continuously hitting-and-running. Utilizing the darkness and their mobility, she repeatedly changed directions, conducting pincer attacks from the left and right as if the two groups were at a constant understanding. Despite suffering immense casualties, the Liberation Army continued their tenacious pursuit.
Now joined by cavalry spearheaded by Fynn, they finally began to regain composure. It was through this brave commander standing at the head of the army and admonishing them that they had regained calmness. While isolating and severing coordination, Fynn was crushing every soldier of the Kingdom.

"You men have fought well. You have done enough. Please throw down your swords and surrender. We will absolutely not treat you poorly. I guarantee it."

Fynn advised surrender to the cornered enemy. In front of his eyes were ten cavalry covered in red. They had separated from Schera's main group, and in such an unexpected situation, they had decided on their own to stand their ground. On their spears were skewered the corpses of the Liberation Army's militiamen. Their black flag was soaked with blood, and it released a slimy, disgusting radiance.

"There's no surrender for Schera's Cavalry. There's no defeat for us."

"Long live Major Schera. Death doesn't exist for Schera's cavalry. We will continue to live alongside Lord Schera."

Replied the cavalrymen, unconcerned. They pulled out their spears from the corpses of the militiamen, and turned their bloodlust towards Fynn. Seeing that, Fynn's adjutant Milla gave a warning.

"These guys, are mad in some respects. Persuasion is impossible I believe. They are dangerous."

"So it does seem. There is no helping it, but let us do them in."

When Fynn gave the signal, they formed ranks and surrounded the cavalrymen. The cavalrymen showing no fear commenced their final attack at Fynn.

"Colonel Fynn!"

"There is no problem."

"——!!"

He exchanged sharp thrusts, and skewed with a counter. At the same time he pulled out, he sweeped, and knocked the rider off the horse. The other cavalrymen too were killed at the hands of the infantrymen's spears.
Every enemy soldier gripped their spears tightly, showing their will to fight, until the end. As long as they had stamina left, they would probably continue to fight again.

"You- cut it out and die!"
"They're still breathing! Soundly finish them!"
"Ha-, ha, are these guys monsters!?"

Having surely given them the final blow, Fynn and infantry decided to head towards the next place.

“Come, let us go towards the next——!?”

From behind his back, a cavalryman who should have been killed leaped up and rushed forward, trying to sever his carotid artery. It was the cavalryman who had been stabbed in the heart earlier. He shouldn’t have been able to move, and yet. Fynn struggled, trying to shake him off, but due to absurd strength, he didn’t as he would’ve liked to. Impatience showed on Fynn’s face for the first time.

“—-VictOry foR Major Schera-!!”

“Colonel Fynn!! You, let go of the Colonel-!!”

Milla forcibly tore him off and cut off the head with her sword.
Fynn’s breathing was ragged, and he stared at the corpse. The face of the corpse, freed from its helmet, had a ghastly smile on it.

“……You s, saved me, Milla. As an enemy, how dreadful. Battle instinct such that they try to kill the enemy even when dead. They do seem to be Death’s Cavalry.”

“……What spurs them on to such extents do you think? They do not appear to value the depraved Kingdom that much.”

“Who knows? I personally do not. Perhaps the commander’s charm?”

Fynn made a small sigh and resume pursuit. Warning bells were going off, his instincts telling him he ought not mess with Death. He stifled that, and advanced into the darkness with not a trace of light. Trepidation could be seen on the soldiers’ faces. They were under the daring and resolute insignia of the lion; however, the darkness stimulated their fear. They didn’t know when, from inside the darkness, a scythe would reach out for them. They held up torches as if performing an exorcism, and they marched inside stillness…while praying they wouldn’t be fascinated by Death.

Night expired, and the pursuit continued even after they crossed the woodlands. Konrad’s unit was totally exhausted and could no longer fight. On the other hand, Schera’s unit continued to march, not breaking rank. If an enemy appeared, they would change course and intercept them; after forcing them away, they would once again return to rank.
The Liberation Army had organized 5,000 as a pursuit unit, and they advanced to the Canaan Area to kill the Death God.
On the other side, Yalder in Roshanak Stronghold, heard news of the enemy movements via his deployed scouts.

“Repel the enemy troops, and immediately rescue the friendly soldiers.”

Kicking a staff officer stopping him, he personally led 4,000 out and launched a surprise attack on the flanks of the Liberation Army in a column formation in hot pursuit. As their file extended in a line, they were divided and fell into disorder. Matching them, Schera’s unit also decisively charged again. They thoroughly beat up

the pursuit unit and routed them.
The surviving forces of the Fourth Army was 2,000. When leaving the castle, the soldiers that had numbered 5,000 was diminished to 2,000.
These men who had gone through hell finally stepped into Roshanak Stronghold while receiving Yalder's assistance.
Everyone had suffered some wound, and their personal appearance was run-down. It was a miracle they made it this far.

"Without Major Schera's actions, these men probably would not have reached Canaan. This strenuous labor, is very befitting of a Death God."

General Yalder sang praises of Major Schera's laborious battle. Although bearing wounds, Konrad who had survived stated his thanks. He had chosen correctly at Death's choice, and had seized his good fortune.
At the same time Schera's promotion to Lieutenant Colonel was decided, she was conferred the Knight of the Kingdom Medal. That was unprecedented in this kind of defeat.

Schera appropriately received it. She didn't care for medals, and what she wanted right now was something completely different. Afterwards, she received special feast that Yalder had prepared, and she finally had a contented smile.

"everyone, you all have truly fought well. the soldiers not here with us, are always with me. thus I have to eat their share."

Schera murmured to herself while moving her knife and fork. The only one who could hear her was Adjutant Katarina beside her.

"Major Schera?"

Curious, Katarina asked Schera.

"No, nothing. Eat, don't mind me. This is a privilege of the living."

"S, sir."

1,500 remained of Schera's Cavalry. All the forces of Roshanak Stronghold: 7,000.
General Yalder, when he decided to meet the Liberation Army here at Canaan, received a messenger from the Royal Capital.
Field Marshal Sharov directly appealed to the Kingdom, and made them approve to dispatch half of the First Army, 50,000, to the Canaan Area. They would divide each corps into smaller units, and continuously send in forces.
Incidentally, Staff Officer Sidamo had escaped from Belta Castle, and once again took his place as Yalder's assistant at Roshanak. He had disguised himself as a plain soldier, and finding an opening, he had escaped.

Witnessing the fall of Belta, the Empire, deeming the time had come, proclaimed a declaration of war against the Kingdom. They began marching towards the Kingdom's northwest. They set about capturing the line of forts in their way. The season was already early autumn, and they sought to capture them in the early stages before the

harsh winter set in.
Meeting them was the Kingdom's Fifth Army. They were a solid Army Corps with men born in the Kingdom's northwest, and their unity was extraordinarily tough.
They had strong anti-Empire sentiments, and an envoy coming to advise surrender was executed on the spot before he opened his mouth.

In the Kingdom's southern area adjacent to the Union was the Kingdom's Second Army rooted to the spot. It was by nature an area with strong feelings of independence, and the instant the Second Army were to leave, it was certain for the feudal lords to revolt.
The tied-down commandant of the Second Army could only grind his teeth, watching the strife everywhere else.

The other party, the Liberation Army who had taken control of the Belta Area, was faced with a choice. Do they seek to capture Canaan and make a beeline for the Royal Capital? Or do they look past subjugation of the Royal Capital and seek to capture the southern area, where there were dangers of independence.
Or maybe, do they go ahead and do both?
Everything, would depend on the decision of the Liberation Army's young leader, Altura.

—-Having turned traitor to the Kingdom's Army, Vander had thrown open the castle gates, and taking advantage of the confusion, he had been successful in taking the head of General David. Recognizing this success, he was welcomed by the Liberation Army and received as a Captain. He entered under Diener's command, and it was decided he would lead the former soldiers of the Kingdom who had surrendered.

"Captain Vander. I heard that you were under Major Schera's command, and her adjutant."

"Sir-, that is correct."

"……There is something I would like to ask you. Do not lie, and tell me the truth. Okay?"

"I am already a man of the Liberation Army. I will tell everything I know."

Diener decided to obtain information regarding Schera. He wanted even the most trivial of details. The Death God's personality, thinking, leadership method–he would grasp and understand those, and in the next battle, he would bring them together.
Sure, Belta Castle had fallen, but individually, he had lost this battle.
He hadn't been perfect; he had let Schera escape. He had wanted to kill that annoying Death God.
—-He would kill her next time. Without fail. Diener interrogated Vander, while concealing his surging desire to murder.

*TL Note: Keikaku means plan. (I’m sorry I had to.)

**死兵 From what little research I did, this term is used for soldiers who go or are sent to battle with the intention of dying. Kind of like martyrs, but more general; anytime when someone is resolved to die. I couldn’t find an official english translation, so I used a phrase instead.

Chapter 18: The Royal Capital's Treats Must Be Delicious

Belta Caste, undergoing repair work post haste.
In the conference room inside the castle, the opinions of the generals and staff officers were completely divided into two between the fast warplan–immediately make Canaan surrender and seek to capture the Royal Capital, and the safe plan–capture the southern area while gunning for Canaan. The men bolstered by their successive victories strongly asserted that they ought to aim for the Royal Capital as soon as possible.

"I would like you all to remember what our great cause is. To liberate the Royal Capital from the hands of the despotic should have been our mission. Then, why do we have to go a roundabout way, I'm having a hard time understanding."

"That's right. While we are twiddling our thumbs, the people are suffering. It's also obvious that the enemy has already caved in. All the more so because the Empire has also declared war. This detour road where we go out of our way to make the Kingdom's south fall is not necessary."

Altura had not yet revealed her own opinion. Until she heard every member's views, she would not give her judgement. Her decision was just that important. The lives of all the Liberation Army's soldiers were at stake.
When Altura sent her gaze towards Diener, he lightly coughed and began speaking.

"……I, think we ought not be impatient. Time is on our side. The more we wait, the more advantageous it is for us, and the more disadvantage it is for the Kingdom's Army. Also, the harsh winter will set in soon. Canaan is not so weak that it can fall in a short timeframe."

There were people who showed bitter expressions hearing Diener's opinion. They were people belonging to an opposition faction, who didn't think well of Diener's rise to prominence. They were long serving members of the Salvador faction, who had accompanied Altura ever since she raised an army. The reinforcements who came from the Empire were also included in this faction.
Or, they were of the Belta faction, surrendered soldiers who midway through had approved of her motives and assembled.
Those closest to Altura were of course mainly the people of the Salvador faction. But, going by just numbers, they were exceeded by the Belta faction, and so their opinions couldn't be ignored.
Altura sought a delicate guidance. When she leaned any which way, that would birth dissatisfaction. It would accumulate and accumulate, and then explode, just like the current Kingdom.

"Oh my oh my, I would not have expected such words from Sir Diener who excels in ingenuity. In the battle a few days ago, the one who sent 5,000 troops in pursuit to Canaan, wasn't it you? They were repelled without accomplishing anything. I won't let you say that you've forgotten all the blood you've spilled"

Criticized Ghamzeh, a staff officer of the Belta faction, and other members agreed.

"That is what happens soldiers are moved without thinking. Sure, it was you, Sir Diener, who felled Belta. That was due to your skill. But, the ones who accomplished it were the officers and men of the Liberation Army, and especially the militiamen who risked their lives participating. I would be worried if you were to forget that it was by the efforts of everyone with alike ideals."

"……Then, does Staff Officer Ghamzeh have a plan for felling Canaan?"

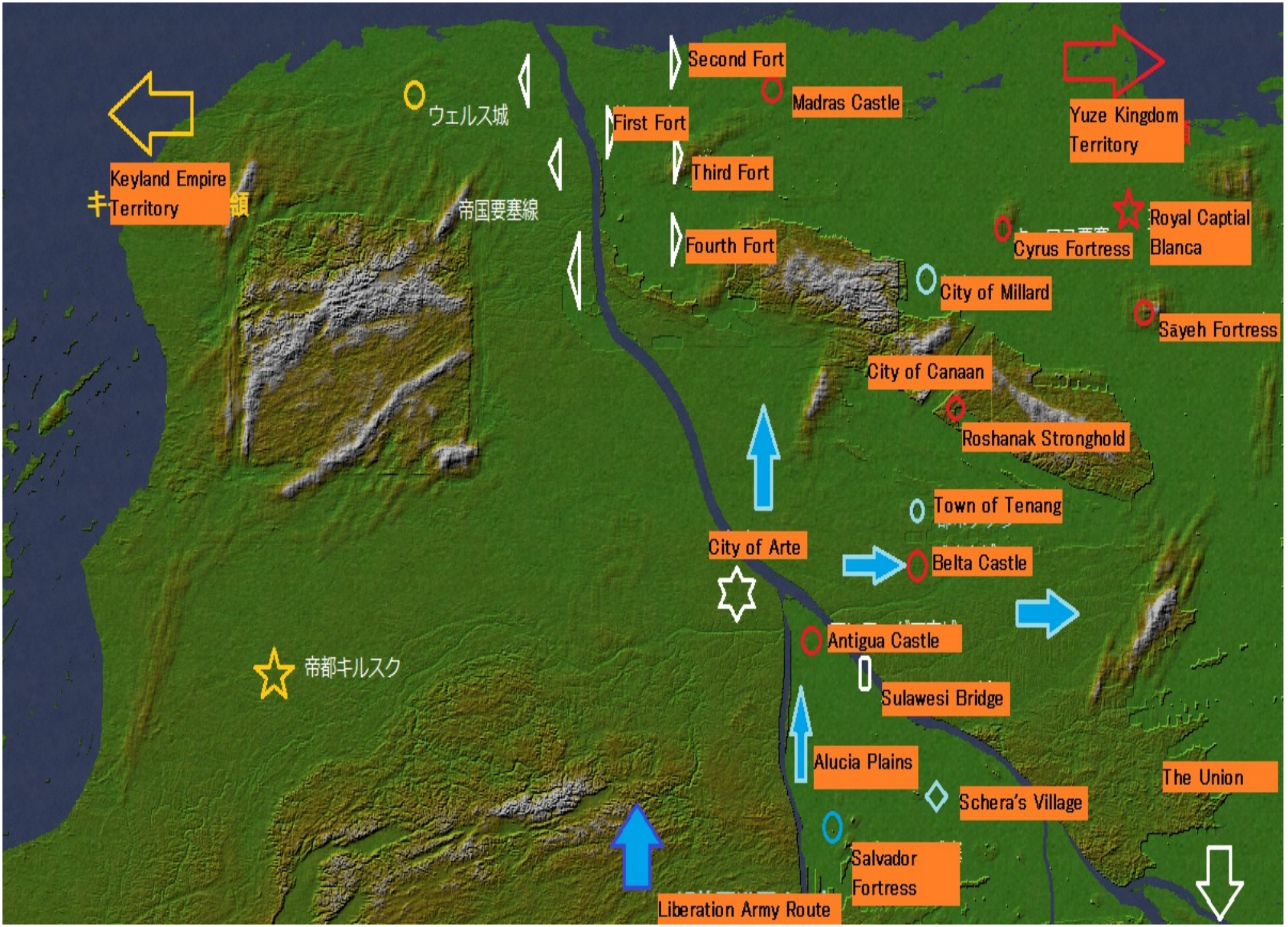
"Of course. I have already put arrangements in order for its capture. I have considerable ties with the feudal lords of the Royal Capital region. We have exchanged messages saying that they will absolutely revolt as soon as we Liberation Army invade the Royal Capital region."

Ghamzeh took out secret messages from his breast pocket. On many letters, the names of feudal lords of the area past the Canaan Area were written down. He had leveraged the connections from when he was affiliated with the Kingdom's Army and put this plan to action.
What the feudal lords were seeking was guarantee of security. This had been easy work for Ghamzeh. Afterwards, he would monopolize achievements in the Belta faction, and had to make a foothold to seize power after gaining control of the Royal Capital. A puppet regime of the Empire was a very real threat. At this rate, the Empire would take advantage of the civil war and act as they pleased. This was a fear that the people formerly of the Kingdom's Army had.
The one who brought about this fear, was Tactician Diener. He was a suspicious character close to Prince Alan dispatched from the Empire, and his birthplace was unknown. He was a thorn in the side for the Belta faction, and they were vigilantly waiting, like a beast hunting its prey, waiting for a timing to overthrow him. He hadn't shown many mistakes before, but the pursuit defeat a few days ago was their long awaited chance they were sure.

"Sir Ghamzeh. I believe I asked about the capturing of Canaan. Capturing the Royal Capital should be a conversation for later."

"Now don't be so flustered Sir Diener, as I will explain in detail hereon. Of my subordinates there are many who know of this area's geography in detail. ……Please take a look at this."

Ghamzeh started to explain while indicating with his finger on the spread out map.


Second Fort
Madras Castle
First Fort
Third Fort
Fourth Fort
ウェルス城
帝国要塞線
Keyland Empire Territory
Yuze Kingdom Territory
Royal Captial Blanca
Cyrus Fortress
City of Millard
Sāyeh Fortress
City of Canaan
Roshanak Stronghold
Town of Tenang
City of Arte
Belta Castle
Antigua Castle
帝都キルスク
Sulawesi Bridge
Alucia Plains
The Union
Schera's Village
Salvador Fortress
Liberation Army Route

"If we are to go for a frontal attack, we will have to control this main, connecting road to the Royal Capital. However, this road is tightly surrounded by steep mountains. A level castle though it may be, there is also Roshanak Stronghold. If they were to take battle formation in this mountainous region, they would be difficult to assault, wouldn't you all say?"

"True, our opponents can fight while making the best of natural, strategic positions, while on the other hand, we will have to constantly fight on level ground."

Altura nodded. Diener was silently listening.

"Exactly. If we decide to recklessly attack, we will suffer terrible losses of troops. …… Here, let us change the conversation for a moment please. Beyond this mountainous region of Canaan are three fortresses. The first is our target, Royal Capital Blanca. Southeast of there is Sayeh Fortress. And then soon to be completed is Cyrus Fortress to the southwest."

He pointed out the places one by one. From Belta, the closest one was Cyrus Fortress in the southeast.
Once they traversed the road, to the west would be Cyrus and to the east would be Sayeh. Then right between them was Royal Capital Blanca which could be seen. This three-pronged defense, assuming they traversed Canaan, would be the Kingdom's final bastion.

"It will become a troublesome enemy for us for how close it is to completion huh."

Behrouz observed while rubbing his white facial hair. While in the middle of capturing one, they would undeniably be attacked from behind. To deal with that, as much as they hated to, they would have to divide their forces.

"Still, I conclude that it is not dangerous as of now. As it is near-completion, guards still have not been stationed. The only ones there are citizens gathered as laborers, inspectors, and a small number of guards. ……Then for us, we are in luck, for we have the guidance of the stars."

While talking about the information gotten from his spies, Ghamzeh proudly tapped the map.
Diener prompted him to continue.

"And this good fortune is?"

"In the Canaan mountains, there exists a pass that only the local people know. Naturally, it is not on maps. Strangers were also not notified of it. Past this shortcut, is the back of this Cyrus Fortress."

From their planned site of capture, he showed an area further west. It was a steep, mountainous area called Golbahar Ridge. Ghamzeh was saying to cross this ridge, expropriate Cyrus, and drive a lynchpin into the Royal Capital Area.

"However, is this not dangerous? You will not be able to able to avoid annihilation if you find yourselves isolated. That does not seem to me a place easy to send reinforcements."

Altura showed her concern, and Ghamzeh shook his head saying there was no need for anxiety.

"It is for that reason that I have schemed with the feudal lords around Cyrus. The people who have the spirit will absolutely cooperate with us. I want to borrow 3,000 light infantry as an advance unit and 5,000 for a rear guard. With just that many, we can defend to the end. It will soon be the advent of winter, and if it snows, it will be impossible for a large army to march. During that time, we will pressure Canaan from the front and back."

"Diener, what do you think?"

"……If this succeeds, Canaan will probably fall without any effort. We will be able to cut off their supply line. As a consequence of Canaan being barren, it will be extremely difficult for domestic production. The supply from the Kingdom is their lifeline. But, the probability is 50-50 I'd say?"

Diener showed misgivings, but Ghamzeh blew it off. He had made preliminary preparations up to here. Though he of his own judgement laid the groundwork with the feudal lords, he had poured in not a negligible amount of funds. He would not pull back after all he had done. He kneeled, lowered his head, and appealed to his own resolution. It wasn't a lie that he had done it for the Liberation Army's victory.

"Princess Altura. Dangers necessarily exist in any plan. But, the Liberation Army would not have come this far if they feared danger. I beg of you, please give me the order. Surely, I will surely bring you success!"

After brooding for a while, Altura gave her decision.

"……Understood. Ghamzeh, I leave the command of the operation to you. However, we will concurrently go to capture the southern area. Diener. You go hasten the plans for the Kingdom's south. Behrouz. You will take the soldiers and go with Diener."

"Sir-!"
"Understood!"

The Liberation Army had decided on their policy.
As the First Division, 30,000 would deploy to the front of Canaan and set up camp. They would tie-down the opponent's defense forces. They would refrain from attacking, and just confronting was their goal to the very end.

As the Second Division, 30,000 would cut off Canaan's supply line, aiming for the Kingdom's Army to perish on their own. If the enemy were to retreat, they would carry out the suppression of Canaan.

Diener and Behrouz were sent for the capture of the Kingdom's South. It was decided that Altura would take overall command from Belta Castle.

That night.
Diener released his agents given secret orders into the Kingdom. If his doubts were correct, they were the insurance. Even if he was worrying for nothing, there wouldn't be a problem. In the rotten Kingdom, there would definitely be people who would make use of the false information they would sow. The Kingdom had already become an ground ripe for secret activities. Soon, an honest tree would wither. All that would

remain would be rotten plants. It would be a simple matter to mow them away.

Kingdom Army controlled Canaan Territory. Roshanak Stronghold Campsite.
While surrounding a bonfire, everyone was having a meal, drinking alcohol, healing their fatigue, and amusing themselves with conversation. There were few pleasures for soldiers. In this kind of remote place, there were no other amusements.

Having earned spectacular war gains and having saved allied soldiers, Schera's Cavalry was received as heroes.
The soldiers of Schera's unit were very popular, and were being asked, "What kind of person is Schera?", and, "Are the rumors of her prowess true?"

"So, is it true? About y'all and Sir Schera. Isn't that Death God thing just a fable? As far as I can see from far away, she ain't no different from the village girls around here."

The guard crossed his arms while groaning quizzically. That they had great activity was certain, he thought, but it was to what degree that he was uncertain of. They had broken through Belta's encirclement, and then beat up the pursuit unit black-and-blue. Just what kind of Hero was that!? He wanted to laugh. This wasn't some fairytale.

"Major Schera, no, maybe Lieutenant Colonel? The rumors are pretty much on the dot. She is only about 18 though. If you just saw her fight once, you won't ever again say it's a lie."

A man from Schera's Cavalry said as he poured more alcohol. Ten men around him, overjoyed, crowded around and listened attentively.

"According to guys that survived, you guys also fought fiercely they say. Maybe you get inspired when Sir Schera leads you? As if right? Hahaha!"

"You guys even got rewarded! Ain't I jealous, cause we're pretty useless hah."

"Maybe I'll try petitioning to change commanders too, since then I can get some achievements and get promoted!"

Everyone joked around while laughing. The man from Schera's Cavalry, while gazing at the bonfire, plainly said,

"……How do I even describe it. When I'm under that flag, fighting together with the Lt. Col., I don't feel scared anymore. I really don't fear dying anymore. Even I think it's kind of strange."

"That's just you being hyped up. Like there'd be anyone not scared of dying."

"Now that you say that, I guess. I get excited fighting, but I definitely am scared of dying."

“Death doesn’t exist for Schera’s Cavalry. We… will never die. Even if we lose our flesh, always under the black flag’s crow, we will be eternally be together with the Lt. Col. That’s why Schera’s Cavalry will nOt be defeated. We wiLl never bE deFeaTeD.”

Everyone while speechless stared at the man who had continued the conversation with blank eyes. As if like reciting from scripture, the man was convinced of the righteousness of his faith. In his eyes shone a fanatical light.

“H, hey.”
“You okay?”

The man snapped back to reality, and looked around his surroundings. He lightly laughed, and gulped down his drink.

“……Whaat? Just speaking figuratively. We fight with that kind of enthusiasm. The Lt. Col. always fights at the vanguard for us. Following her is the least we can do.”

“Oh, okay. How reliable.”

“Well, let’s drink. If you don’t drink when you can, you’re going to regret it.”

“Y, yeah! C’mon, drink, drink!”

“……..”

After that, everyone continued to drink in silence. Like trying to smother the fear of death. Like trying frantically to avert their eyes from it. It, being the black flag fluttering high above the stronghold. Its white crow–they prayed that it wouldn’t swoop down to their own backs. If they were possessed by it, they would surely become like that:

—-The man of Schera’s cavalry, was happily gazing at the flag.

Roshanak Stronghold, Officer Dining Room
Schera was invited to a meal by Yalder. Though Belta may have fallen, for individual military gains, she had earned merit that no other could match. Yalder was in an extremely good humor, and was drinking alcohol while heartily laughing.

“Major Schera. No, Lieutenant Colonel! I wasn’t wrong to have recommended you!”

“Thank you very much, Your Excellency.”

“Ah–, don’t worry about the formalities. Don’t hold back; eat, eat. I heard from Sidamo that you like eating more than anything. Isn’t that right, Staff Officer Sidamo!”

“Sir-, you are not mistaken.”

Having made it back from Belta, Sidamo nodded. He had some wounds, but not to the degree that he couldn't move. He had once again taken his place as Yalder's aide, and was working as a Staff Officer.
Schera looked at Sidamo with a sidelong glance and returned to eating again afterwards. Some kind of grilled fish that she didn't know of, rabbit meat, mushrooms, wild plants, fruit. Maybe they could be called blessings of the mountains? Though the ground may be barren, the mountains by themselves would have these harvests.

"Mm, mm! At the dawn of the Third Army's revival eventually, I plan on having the Lt. Col. be the force's keystone. We will absolutely take back the pride of the fallen Steel Division at the next battle. Got it, Sidamo!?"

"Sir-, I, Sidamo, will expend all my power."

"Good to hear! Well then, you should slowly enjoy yourselves. Eat as much as you like; I won't mind. I will be going first. If something comes up, don't hold back and come look for me."

"Understood!"

Schera saluted while eating, and Yalder departed after a stifled laugh. His former manner of haughtiness was becoming more subdued.
Sidamo, thinking that this was a good trend, nodded to himself. As long as he didn't have his arrogance, Yalder was a peerless commander. Though if he didn't have it, without any special connection to nobility, Yalder would not have been entrusted as the commander of the Third Army.

"Well then, Lt. Col. I will also excuse myself. You've done well living and making it back. Your instructions have not changed. If you're going to die, die outside. Dying inside a fort is a waste of the cavalry."

"I understand, Staff Officer Sidamo."

"……Don't worry about that thing with Vander. We will make him accept punishment for turning traitor someday. This will not be your duty. Though you probably understand without me telling you."

"I will massacre the rebel army. He will be killed by my hands invariably."

"A death sentence from the Death God huh? Hmph, I wish I could let that guy hear it."

Sidamo snorted and left.
Schera strongly stabbed the fork into the lump of rabbit meat, and violently bit some off. It tasted of rich blood.

—-Next day.

The main body of the First Army lead by Field Marshal Sharov took up their new post at Roshanak Fortress. Sharov immediately called the generals and opened a war council. He had sent out the scouts that had come with him here and was getting a general picture. Losing Belta was a serious setback, but he would not cry over spilled milk. Now, they had to defend Canaan to the last and absolutely prevent an invasion of the Royal Capital.

"……We have lost the Belta Area, but we still will not permit an invasion towards the Royal Capital. I have heard that the Fifth Army in the northwest is putting up a good fight against their opponents, the Empire. If they continue at this rate, they probably won't fall before winter. Once winter comes, the ones to die will be the Empire lot."

The Imperial Army was struggling in the northwest fortress area. Unexpectedly, the Kingdom's soldiers were maintaining discipline. If the Fifth Army had faced off against the Liberation Army, the northwest region would have probably easily fallen. But, to the residents of the northwest area, The Imperial Army was an absolutely irreconcilable arch-enemy. There was a long hated of mutually killing and being killed. After all this time, compromise was unimaginable. The people took the initiative, and got to their feet to fight with the soldiers of the Empire. As shitty as the Kingdom was, it was more preferable than surrendering to the Empire, they thought. If placed under the Empire's control, it was clear that they would suffer unsparing oppression. Old, young, men, and women–everyone realized that this was a grim hour, and they all wielded swords and rose up.

They met the Empire's main force at the forts, and disrupted the enemy's supply train with commando units lurking everywhere. The Imperial Army, having commando units of the Kingdom with homefield advantage as their adversaries, were at a loss. Repeating these raids at the most unexpected of places and at the most unexpected of moments, the citizens voluntarily lended their aid. Who was military and who was civilian could no longer be distinguished. If they were defeated, the reign would become even more distressing.
Also, winter would soon come. Supplies would become a trouble, and marches would not go well. The plan to blitz the fortress area and aim for the Royal Capital was already at a standstill. But for their honor, they could not withdraw. They would draw both sides into a nothing but wasteful war of attrition.
Starting the war in autumn was the cause of all the Empire's problems. They had taken the area lightly, thinking that if they displayed military force, the area would immediately capitulate.

"We have obtained intelligence that the enemy is moving their soldiers to capture Canaan. So that we can deal with them whenever, we have to put our preparations in order."

"No, instead, how about we launch an assault on Belta? If the enemy is drunk on their victory and show an opening."

Proposed Lieutenant General Barbora, but Sharov rejected it.

"Leave out the nonsense. If we suffer a crushing defeat next time, that would affect the life and death of the Kingdom. We must be prudent when moving the army. Refrain yourself from rash speech and conduct."

"S-Sir-! I beg your pardon!"

After glaring at Barbora, Sharov turned his gaze to Yalder, concerning his duty of defending Roshanak.

"Your Excellency Field Marshal, I, Yalder, had blundered at Antigua, and have no reputation nor honor. Nevertheless, I would like a chance to wipe out this disgrace. In the next battle, please appoint me to the vanguard! I will slay the rebel army without fail, I will show you-!!"

Appealed Yalder while flushing red. Being a warden of Roshanak was not a joking matter. He would be the head of the army and defender of Canaan. For Yalder, that was a role he wanted to undertake no matter what.

"Yalder. Until we arrived, you've done well protecting Roshanak Stronghold. You are acknowledged as far as that goes. —-But, it seems you have not listened to my directive."

"W, what would that be?"

"'Do not act rashly and avoid excessive ardor.' That should have been my order. Yalder. You were imprisoned by what was in front of you eyes; how would you take responsibility if the fortress fell!? If the enemy had sent in a detached force, what would have become of Roshanak!? You would have repeated the same blunder as with Antigua!!"

Rebuked Sharov, who was unusually indignant. Yalder sputtered while he objected.

"Our allies on the retreat were being pursued by the enemy! What was wrong with helping them!!? I could not just abandon them-!!"

"……Yalder. You, it seems you haven't reflected. If you're here, the defense of Canaan will be in jeopardy. That Roshanak has been safe was nothing more than luck."

"Your Excellency Sharov-!!"

Seeing that, Barbora snickered. He had been troubled that Yalder had been reinstated and given the meritorious duty of defending Roshanak. He couldn't stop inwardly laughing at a reprimand that he hadn't expected of Sharov. He wanted to clap his hands. That urge would probably be taken to the extreme in this next instant:

"Yalder, you are demoted to Lieutenant General. Take the soldiers of Belta and return to the Royal Capital as you are. Your punishment will be designated later on. Here is a written notification of your demotion. Pass this on to Staff Officer Sidamo afterwards. Open your eyes, and drive this into your head."

Sharov cold-heartedly told Yalder while showing him an envelope. Yalder's face had gone pale, and he had been listening in a daze.

"Y, your Excellency. P, please reconsider. I beg of you, please, one more chance!"

"Annoying. The order has been given. Someone, take Yalder outside. It seems he's too tired and unsteady on his legs."

Instructed Sharov, and Barbora approached with a smile.

"General Yalder, I mean, *Mr.* Yalder. This is not a place for you. It would be great if you could just hurry on back to the Royal Capital."

"B-Barbora! You bastard-!"

"Guards! Accompany Sir Yalder back to his room! The Lieutenant General is a little tired!"

Yalder decided to struggle, but he was subdued by the guards that came running, and was carried out by force. Seeing him gone, Sharov let out a small sigh.

"……Well then, let's carry on the war council."

Schera's Office.
Having received a report from Katarina, Schera was nodding her head disinterestedly. Schera's Cavalry which had been of the Fourth Army would be sent back to the Royal Capital. His Excellency the former General Yalder was completely disheartened and seemed likely to commit suicide. Sidamo had said that these days, he didn't even have that normal energy of his. Having his ups and downs, the former General also had his various troubles it seemed.
'Take preparations for battle,' Schera murmured in a small voice. She was probably thinking about something.
Considering it was Schera, what she would do would not change, so she didn't particularly care. Katarina also seemed to be thinking about something, but she didn't decide to speak of it.

"Second Lieutenant Katarina. Got candy?"

"Sir-, please take this."

Katarina took out a candy from a bottle and presented it. Schera pinched it up and threw it in an arc into her mouth. Schera had a dubious expression, because it tasted of salt.

"……Second Lieutenant Katarina. What is this, I wonder?"

"A hard candy with added salt. I have heard that the good parts of sweet and salty mix well. It is an excellent item where you can take in salt and sugar at the same time."

"Oh. So, have you tried it?"

"No, of course I have not. I had bought this for you, Lt. Col. It was quite a high-class item, sold in the town of Canaan."

"I'll give all of them to you. It'll be a present from me. Make sure to eat all of it."

"S, sir. Thank you very much."

Katarina pushed up her glasses.
While watching that, Schera crushed the candy that had a complicated taste. The last bits were extremely salty.

The Royal Capital Blanca–Schera had not once been there. Surely, it would probably be an amazingly lively place. She had heard that there would be many treats. While imagining them, Schera began to doze off little by little.
Katarina moved her to the bed. Everyone was tired. They had always been fighting together. On a day like this, they should leisurely rest.

—-Roshanak garrison, a mixed unit of the Third and Fourth Armies, under Lieutenant General Yalder were ordered to return to the Royal Capital.
Afterwards, they would be named Yalder’s United Legion.* They numbered 7,000.

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*ヤルダー混成師団 Not technically correct, but United Legion sounds more badass.

Chapter 19: Well Boiled Tomato Soup is Wonderfully Delicious

Yalder's United Legion had been ordered to reposition to the Royal Capital. Taking along the defeated soldiers from Antigua and Belta, Yalder headed towards his destination with heavy steps. After having been demoted, he had lost his appetite, and his face had become pale. Since Yalder was rather overweight, Sidamo inwardly thought that this was a good thing.
An express messenger from Sharov visited this depressed Yalder.
'Stand by and wait for orders.'
Hearing that, Yalder was exasperated, thinking, 'is he harassing me now?' Sidamo went to comfort him. 'This is a unique chance to rid yourself of the dishonor,' he said.
Yalder, not understanding what Sidamo meant, had a question mark above his head.
'Let's just follow instructions right now,' strongly counselled Sidamo without answering Yalder's confusion.
Also, as to carry out one more secret order, Sidamo gave instructions to Schera's Cavalry. She was the strongest card in his hand–the card of Death. 'Flush out the colluding feudal lords, and gather information.'

In the Kingdom's southern area, the feudal lords' movements reeked of conspiracy–this had reached Sharov through his scouts. Through investigation, he understood that they were gathering an excessive supply of goods and mercenaries. Judging that the possibility they would rise to action in concert with the enemy was high, he had feigned dismissing Yalder, and sent them in as a covert squadron. Pity for the person concerned, but Yalder's personality was one that couldn't put up an act, so he had no choice. Since he had a suitable reason to be dismissed, and it wouldn't give the colluders misgivings, Yalder was chosen. Sharov needed to put on the act since they were in a situation where even the contents of the war council would be passed to the enemy through their spies.

Sharov had sensed signs that an enemy surprise attack was probable, but he couldn't read as far as their route of invasion: Cyrus, Sayeh, there was also the possibility they would outwit them and assault Roshanak Stronghold. Currently, the enemy's main force was heading towards the front of Canaan's main road, and a division of Sharov's First Army had taken formation to meet them. Normally, he wouldn't be concerned about losing. The enemy was also just confronting them, and an assertive offensive wouldn't come. Only sporadic skirmishes were occuring.

"I knew it. They're waiting for something, that much is obvious…"

"I feel no will to attack from the enemy. I think it is as you say, Field Marshal. We ought to increase the number of scouts and strengthen our lookouts."

Sharov muttered while looking at the map. Major General Larus agreed with him. He was a general barely approaching 40, and he didn't particularly excel in military prowess, but he had steady leadership. His personality was very cooperative, and he was a good commander to work with from Sharov's point of view. As these kinds of people had become scarce, Sharov was desperate to have him. He didn't mind comrades who had desire for promotions, but there were too many of them who

behaved based on their own judgement.

He didn't want to speak ill of David, who had died in battle, but losing Belta had definitely been devastating. Even if they protected Canaan, it was not unlikely the Liberation Army would aim for the Royal Capital via the Kingdom's south. Before the Kingdom would gradually fall to ruin, he had to take some kinds of measures. But, his pieces were too few for that. His own First Army couldn't even move freely. 'Wasn't there any way to eliminate that parasitic fiend, Farzam?' He inwardly thought.

"We will not make any progress at this rate. We should might as well launch an attack. Has not a request from the Royal Capital come, saying to annihilate them?"

Lieutenant General Barbora called for a proactive offensive. This man, a lump of desire for promotion, was absurdly strong when the wind was behind his back, but was weak when beaten down. He was the type of person unsuited towards defense. For the most part, it would be this kind of recklessness that would cause a firm formation to be broken. Sharov hadn't wanted to appoint him, but there were political nepotism circumstances, so there was nothing he could do about it.

"Ignore the request of the man who doesn't know the actual situation. Now isn't the time for incautious movements."

"What are you saying!? That may have been the Field Marshal's words, but that is disrespect towards His Majesty!"

"Myself was talking about Farzam. The foolish instructions all came from that man. Some youngster who hasn't ever been in the Army shouldn't boldly meddle in a war. Grief, what a terrible era it has become. How he lived this long is a mystery."

"Your Excellency. Any more is"

"You're right. Myself talking is of no help. We should just consider how to successfully defend Canaan."

"……."

When Larus requested prudence, Sharov cleared his throat.
Barbora harrumphed in ill humor.

"……It is about time soon that General, I mean, Lieutenant General Yalder arrives at the Royal Capital."

To change the subject, Larus spoke of Yalder's case.

"He'll probably arrive after a few more days. Sometime in the future, I plan on giving him another chance. His decisive personality is not displeasing to myself. What's essential is that he becomes humble."

Calmly fibbed Sharov while rubbing his facial hair. If everything went as planned, they should have already began work weeding out the conspirators. Also, that Death God who has recently become the talk of rumors was under Yalder it seemed. In such a critical situation, her presence was quite reassuring.
While gazing at the map of battle formations on top of the desk, Sharov racked his cob-webbed brain.

—-It was evening.
While basking in the red rays of the sun, 100 cavalrymen lead by Schera were marching in rank.

“We met quite a bit of unforeseen difficulties. Unexpectedly, it appears they had a strong sense of duty.”

Schera spurred on her horse while putting her scythe on her shoulder. Next to her was Katarina in line holding a sack.
The strangely bulky sack would be necessary “proof” in the next town. The thing held in the cloth sack was fresh, and its fluid was soaking through.

“However, due to the Lt. Col.’s superb questioning, we have gotten hold of most of the information. You were also able to extrapolate the principal offender, splendid.”

“Praising me won’t net you anything. Unfortunately. I don’t have anything anymore.”

Schera shrugged her shoulders. She looked back at the cavalrymen trailing behind her.

“Once we arrive, start preparations for food. I’m already so hungry I could die. I’ve eaten all that we have sadly.”

She turned over a small bag. All that fell out were crumbs of bread. Whether she liked it or not, there was nothing left. Even if she shouted, that wouldn’t fill her stomach. It would be a waste of stamina.

“Sir, please leave it to me. I have packed a set of cooking tools. I have also obtained ingredients some time ago, so I believe you will definitely be satisfied.”

A cavalryman smiled, showing his white teeth.

“Yo, when’d you buy them?”
“When you guys were languidly on guard.”
“Oh you trying to make yourself look good!”

The crowd of cavalry around her went into an uproar. Schera nodded a few times, and smiled cheerily.

“I’m looking forward to it. Let’s hurry up and finish our work, and then eat some good food. I hope this time won’t take too long.”

“Sir-, we will be arriving shortly!”

The town of Millard was in sight with its front gates tightly shut. This city was located west of the soon-to-be-completed Cyrus Fortress. Its feudal lord, Evjen, seemed to

understand reason in comparison to other nobles, and his reputation amongst the soldiers and citizens was favorable. Moreover, he excelled in leadership, and they heard he often bore the role of mediator between neighboring feudal lords.
The Kingdom's flag was waving over the town, but on its surrounding ramparts glinted the eyes of archers prepared for war. Schera's mouth curved, thinking how helpful it was that he was truly easy to understand.

—-They exchanged a back and forth in front of the gate, and finally entered the town an hour after that.

Millard's feudal lord, Baron Evjen, was distressed. Before long, a Liberation Army unit would cross over the ridge; yet, why at this timing would a unit of the Kingdom come along? There had only been a small crack in his discretion, that much was certain. But, there wasn't enough time. Goods and personnel were necessary to rise up and hold out until winter would come. He had taken out funds for just that, employed mercenaries, and prepared goods to offer the Liberation Army. He had needed to coercively hasten things along..

"……What should I do?"

"Honored Father. The unit of the Kingdom has not yet entered the town. Let us immediately drive them away. They cannot come inside!"

Evjen's eldest son suggested a hard-line policy. He was Evjen's prided son, overflowing with wisdom and with a future to look forward to. He would someday be the successor of this Millard territory, and would maybe develop it further. But, he was still young. He lacked experience. For a 20 or so year old, it was impossible to escape from this situation.
If they chose to fight, the Kingdom's Army would immediately march on them, and Millard would fall. In the plan, the Liberation Army would first aim for the barely occupied Cyrus Fortress. The Kingdom would probably ignore Millard, which would have "fallen." The Kingdom doing that may seem heartless, but as a tactic, it was correct. This operation would come to naught if the main target, Cyrus, didn't fall,.

"If we chase them away, our will to rebel would be clear, and their forces would immediately head towards us. That danger has to be taken into account. After all, we still don't precisely know our opponent's motives."

"Still, I cannot believe that the Kingdom's cavalry would come all the way out here at this time. It is obvious that they have gotten wind of something! Ushering them in would be suicidal!"

Evjen spoke up to calm his shouting son whose face was reddening.

"But, there's still no way they know everything. Their forces are too few if they were coming to suppress a rebellion. It's likely they're here to descry the situation while showing off their might. It serves as both a check and a threat."

Evjen's decision would affect the lives of the neighboring feudal lords. Their lives were very much intertwined here. They had wagered all their chips into the Liberation Army. They could no longer backtrack.

"……Then, will you really let them in?"

"Making them wait anymore would probably make them suspicious. It'll be fine if we play it off as vigilance against night burglars. As for their questioning, we shall adapt ourselves to the situation and respond. Leave the rest to me. You take the other things and go to the room."

"……I understand. Honored Father, I beg you to take care of yourself."

While having an expression that showed he didn't agree, the eldest son returned to the room where the family was waiting. Evjen called the guards and fortified the perimeter of the reception room. He instructed the mercenaries outside to take up arms and ordered them to kill everyone immediately upon the signal. If by any chance the discussion were to break down, he had to kill the one hundred cavalry. It would be fatal if even one rider were to escape. He absolutely had to exterminate them.

"Well now, the rest depends on the opponent. Though I would love it if they somehow quietly went back. As of now, there's no need for pointless bloodshed."

Evjen took a big, deep breath to calm his nerves. Then, he steeled himself, straightened his back, and headed to the reception room.

Parlor, surrounded by guards.
There were two female officers. One officer had a small stature and wasn't even mature enough to be 20 it seemed, but was clad in black armor very unsuited for her. The other was a nervous officer with glasses. As soon as he entered the room, they turned their eyes towards him, as if surveying him.

"My my, thank you for taking the trouble of coming all the way to a place like this. I am called Evjen, the one governing this belt of Millard. I hope to make your acquaintance."

While making a forced smile, he sat down across from them.
The small-statured girl was sitting with a smile on her face. The woman with the glasses stood beside her, and was whispering something into her ear. Somehow, it seemed the short girl was of a higher rank. When he squinted his eyes to check, her proof of rank was Lieutenant Colonel. The woman with the glasses was wearing one of a Second Lieutenant. How did this kind of girl who looked powerless become a Lieutenant Colonel? Was the Kingdom's Army just in that much distress?
—-It seemed his decision hadn't been wrong, Evjen inwardly thought.

"Good evening, Baron Evjen. I am Lieutenant Colonel Schera with a cavalry unit affiliated with Yalder's United Legion of the Kingdom's Army. This is my adjutant, Second Lieutenant Katarina."

“I am Katarina. It is an honor to lay eyes upon the renowned Baron Evjen.”

The woman officer called Katarina very deeply lowered her head. At her feet was a sack wrapped in cloth. Maybe it was intended to be a visiting gift.

“Lieutenant Colonel Schera, and Second Lieutenant Katarina? Well, please make yourselves at home. It must certainly have taken great effort for someone so young to have made it up to Lieutenant Colonel.”

“You flatter me. After killing enemies, before I knew it, I made it up to this rank. I myself am bewildered. I have no handle of commanding after all.”

Responded Schera while laughing. Her eyes weren’t laughing at all. She was continuing to observe Evjen’s behavior. Same with Katarina. Her feet were slightly apart, and she had a stance like she would unsheathe her sword at any moment. They completely distrusted him. Sweat appeared on Evjen’s brow.

“……And so, just what business is there at this late hour? Recently, a kind of night burglar has been frequenting. I have taken labor to get validation. If I could, I would welcome any advance information.”

Evjen clapped his hands, sending the signal, and wine was poured into the glasses prepared in front of Schera and Katarina. Red wine. He instinctively thought it was an inauspicious color. When he clapped his hands one more time, that would be the signal for the guards to barge in. These pitiful officers would be caught in a bloodbath. If possible, he wanted this to end peacefully.
He prayed they were reasonable people. At the worst, he was fine with them taking money. Or maybe, if he got them on his side, these women’s futures would be bright too. There shouldn’t be any reason to stay with the Kingdom that was heading towards ruin.

“That would be something you would know the best right? Baron Evjen.”

‘What are you saying?’, said Schera as she tilted the glass. Red fluid sloshed.

“Dear me, I am unable to understand what you are saying but…… It seems you harbor doubts about this humble me. I swear to the Star God that there is no such thing.”

He declared, sticking out his chest, and there was loud laughter.

“—-Ahaha-! What a cheap God, Baron Evjen. Please do not make me laugh so much. My stomach is rumbling.”

“Even if you say so, the truth is the truth. First, I would like you to clearly say, so that this humble Evjen can understand, what you want to enquire about.”

When Evjen feigned innocence, Schera exasperatedly shook her head. Katarina had her eye on him without so much as a blink.

“Simply put, Evjen. When and from where is the scum of the Liberation Army coming? If you confess everything right now, I’ll permit you only your life.”

Schera’s attitude took a completely change, and she threatened with an expression like a beast. Evjen was involuntarily lost for words, but he quickly pulled himself

together. This was after all a threat. There was no way she could actually do it. He could not yield here.

"……What an impolite use of words for a Lieutenant Colonel. That was extremely, extremely discomforting. What a rash remark towards a man who swears absolute loyalty to the Kingdom!"

"Then, you won't mind if I take that as you having no intention of speaking honestly?"

"I am not in a position to speak honestly; I do not know at all what matter you mean! If your business is just that, I would like you to immediately leave. I will sent a protest to the Kingdom in due form about this matter. You should resolve yourself as much as you can! Guards, take the Lieutenant Colonel back! See her off!"

Evjen shouted, but there was not a quiver from the guards waiting next to the doors. They were petrified on the spot, as if they were sculptures.

"Hey, didn't you hear me! Guards!"

"……How noisy. Katarina, seize this fussy man."

"Sir-!"

Katarina produced her cane and called for the guards. They grasped his arms and pressed his face onto the table. Evjen was restrained by strength not owned by humans.

"W, what are you doing-!? You bastards, have you gone mad!?"

He angrily shouted, but the guards didn't move. Their eyes weren't focused on anything. Their complexion was darkish, and out of their throats stuck out sharp knives. The blood had coagulated, and only that area was dark red.

"—-Wh, what's that wound. Why can they m, move!? Y, you, just what"

"Evjen. This isn't a situation to worry about others. I'll give you just one more chance to choose. Think carefully. If you honestly speak everything now, I will kill only you. There's also proof, so how about confessing I wonder."

Schera tapped the table slowly with her finger and offered him the choice.

"P, proof!? There's no way you would ha—-"

"We have it. Amazing proof that would absolutely satisfy you too. So fresh that it might still be living. Please take a good look with those eyes."

Waiting beside nearby, Katarina placed the cloth sack at her feet on top the table. The bottom part of the cloth had changed color to black and was giving off a stench. Katarina skillfully undid the knot, and there was…

"C, Czeslaw!?"

Czeslaw, the feudal lord of the town neighboring Millard. The two towns were nearby, and he had a close friendship with him.

He was the man Evjen had first revealed the plan to. Now looking however, he had become a tragic figure.

“The former sir feudal lord of the neighboring town. He had been quite stubborn, but in the end, he spoke his heart out. About the locations of the letters you two had exchanged. About what kind of plan it would be. Except, the most vital informations, are something only you know right? That was the reason we came all the way out here. Do you understand I wonder.”

Next to Czeslaw’s head, she threw a bundle of letters. Secret messages that had been strictly safekept inside of a vault.

“……Kuh-”

“So, your answer?

Schera asked the final question.
Evjen, after keeping silent, shook his head sideways.

“I, I don’t know. Even if you show me something like that, it means nothing to me! If you understand, hurry up and leave!”

He tried to squirm free from the guards restraining him. But, his body couldn’t move. Seeing that, Schera tiredly let out a sigh.

“I’m hungry, so I didn’t want this to be something troublesome. No matter, let’s get it over with.”

“Lieutenant Colonel., please leave it to me this time. I will make him spit everything out, absolutely.”

“……You’ll be okay? If it’s impossible, I’ll do it.”

“No, there will be no problem. I may look like this, but I have knowledge more or less. I will *do it* so that he will himself will want to talk, please allow me to show you .”

Katarina made some toying motion with her hand. It gave an impression like something spherical was rolling in her palms. It was probably some bad habit. Schera, deciding well it’ll fine, entrusted everything to her.

“Well then, I’ll return back to beside everyone. The materials are shut up in the aforementioned room. It seems to be quite a large family. Use only what’s necessary. Freely to your heart’s content.”

“Sir-, please leave it to me! ……Well then, Baron Evjen, shall we go?”

Katarina approached Evjen and whispered quietly into his ear. At the tone of her voice, he reflexively got goosebumps.

“S, stop! I don’t know-! I really don’t know-!”

“It took three people for Baron Czeslaw. How many will you take? —-Ufufufu-”

Making the guards gag his screaming mouth, Katarina left with him on their shoulders.
After finishing the wine, Schera left the glass upside down. A red stain spread on the white tablecloth. In its center, some dark stain was spreading out. What a strange sight, thought Schera like it was none of her business.

Millard's Central Plaza.
The cavalrymen were making a bonfire while cooking. Surrounding them were mercenaries revealing their bloodthirst.
Schera cheerfully spoke up.

"How's cooking preparations?"

"Sir-, they are going well!"

"The menu?"

"Fish and vegetable soup. There are bread, cheese, and the usual dried meat. The centerpiece is the soup. The taste of seasoned vegetables has been brought out and is delicious."

"I'm looking forward to it. Well then I wonder, let's do some exercise first.

Schera grabbed her scythe that she had leaned on a wall. Except for the chef soldier, everyone took up their respective weapons.

"Y, you bitches! Wanna go-!?"
"You think you can win with this number of people!?"
"If you don't want to die, drop your weapons!"

From the mercenaries' mouths came words of intimidation. They were waiting for Evjen's signal, but they had surrounded them without waiting. They were itching for a fight; they were men from collapsed bandit troupe. They wouldn't wait for something like instructions of a noble.

"Lieutenant Colonel?"

"Kill everyone holding weapons. Treat the others as civilians. For now, this is a town in the Kingdom's territory. If we make a mistake, that'll be bad in all sorts of ways right?"

"Understood!"

"—-Get them!"

At that signal, the soldiers rushed at the mercenaries. Schera had hurled small sickles and had already killed two. Around the bonfire unfolded a tragedy. There was no way a mish-mash of mercenaries could win against the cavalry members who had different

training and higher morale. Their numbers were diminishing incredibly fast.

"H, hey. Shouldn't we also back them up?"

"W, wait. Drop your sword. Absolutely do not get involved. You'll be killed."

The man trembling in fear threw his sword in front of him and warned the mercenary next to him to absolutely not get involved.

"W, why?"

"……Look at those guys' flag. Black, with a white crow coat of arms. I've seen that on the battlefield. That's bad news. It's the Death God. Schera's emblem. If you don't want to die, hurry and throw away your sword!"

"I, I get it okay. I don't really get it though. I just think your words are kinda true."

Suppressed by the other man's authority, he threw away his sword in front of him, not understanding what he meant. He didn't agree, but the vicinity near the bonfire was already a sea of blood. Soldiers stepped on the backs of feeble breathing mercenaries and skewered them with spears. A girl not to be trifled with was bisecting humans while easily handling a scythe. He couldn't understand what was what.

And so thus, the last man was thrown down, and his head was stepped on by the female officer. Along with an exhale at the point of effort, his head was exploded, smashed like a tomato. That scene was like watching some kind of bad dream.

"Lieutenant Colonel. We are done for the most part. The two over there are the only ones remaining."

Reported a soldier while wiping off dust. No one had suffered any wounds it seemed. Everyone was checking their weapons.

"Good work. More importantly, is the soup okay? Did I go too overboard I wonder."

Schera worriedly looked into the cauldron. Something red was mixed in. The chef soldier started mixing it, saying it was fine. He had been constantly cooking in the middle of the battlefield. Maybe as a result, a fragrant smell that tempted the appetite began wafting in the air.

"There is no problem. It has been awhile, so I tried throwing in tomatoes and mixing in spices. This will warm up your body when you eat it, as a result of the spiciness."

"That sounds great. Probably thanks to the approaching winter, it's been really cold recently. Let's have everyone taste it. A meal is more enjoyable with everyone."

"It will be about time soon for Second Lieutenant Katarina to return. I will properly finish up before them."

"I leave it to you. I will greet the remaining humans."

While waving her scythe to get rid of the clots of blood, the character who played the leading role in causing this tragedy approached.
The two survivors didn't do anything but stand stock still while shivering in terror.

Schera approached, to scythe range, and further to point blank range, and she smiled, showing her white teeth, while her palm, wet with red, brushed the cheek of a mercenary.
The slimy feeling made the man feel Death.

"You guys, have made the correct choice. Very fortunate of you. You should happily live out your life from hereon. It'll be a waste if you die in vain."

"Hih, h——"

Schera rubbed his cheek. Red thickly painted his face. Mixed in with the blood was some kind of piece of meat that stuck to him. The man didn't want to know what that something was.

"Fufu, I'm not going to eat you or anything. There's tasty soup over there after all. If it's alright with you, wanna eat together?"

"—-N, no well, I"

"If you change your mind, come talk. Tonight, we'll spend the night here.* See yah."

Schera removed her hand, and returned to the bonfire in good humor. The man had gotten over his fear, and was gazing at Schera's face before he knew it. The mercenary neighboring him tried to get his attention, concerned, but his words didn't reach the man's ears.

One hour later.
Katarina came out from the feudal lord's mansion.
The soup was simmering pleasantly. It would soon be time to eat.

"Katarina, how'd it go? Were you properly able to do it I wonder."

"Sir, he spilled out everything. I used four people. He was quite obstinate, but in the end, he said, 'I'll say everything, so please forgive me.' He should have just said that from the beginning; that stupid man."

Reported Katarina with a smiling face. Her entire body was covered in blood, and some unrecognizable things were sticking to her. The person herself showed no signs of caring. The cavalrymen were also composedly chatting.
Schera wiped the filth off Katarina's face with a towel, and then wiped the filth stuck to her armor. While that was happening, Katarina muttered, 'extremely sorry for causing you trouble.' During that time, she was making a toying-with-something gesture as always. This time, her hand wasn't empty, but had the actual item in it. They bumped around, and she skillfully rotated them with her hand. They looked much like walnuts, Schera thought.

"Second Lieutenant, even if you hold those kind of things, they won't fill your belly. I'll give you these, so throw those away."

Schera tossed two walnuts that she kept hidden on her to Katarina.

"—-Eh, o, okay! W-whew. I was about to drop them. Thank you very much!"

Flustered in case she dropped them, she caught them and dropped the two things she had held up until now towards her feet. They were dirtied by the soil, so she *squish*, stepped on them while they were on the ground. It seemed she was much more taken by the present from her superior officer. She started rolling them around again. The walnuts made clacking sounds.

"Come, let's have our long awaited dinner. We've been waiting for you. As for the report to Staff Officer Sidamo, let's tell him we left right after finishing eating."

"Understood!"

Katarina saluted and approached the open fire in a jog.

"Now, let us eat. There's a great smell. The person who made this must be skilled I wonder."

"I am honored to receive your praise!"

When she praised the soldier, he shouted, standing up from his spot and saluting. The surrounding soldiers were throwing complaints that he was too loud. They were also throwing pebbles.

In order, the soup, bread, and dried meat were distributed, and everyone gave praise to the white crow of the black flag. This wasn't something someone had started. It just naturally became like this–since they felt like they would be blessed somehow.

To where they were having the meal, hesitatingly came the mercenary that had thrown away his sword earlier. When Schera handed him soup, he said his thanks and started drinking. At the large plaza littered with corpses, the cavalrymen spent their time very enjoyably.

—-Report from Schera's Cavalry.

The rebel army will cross Golbahar Ridge, designing to assault Cyrus Fortress.
They will number 3,000 light infantry as the vanguard, and 5,000 as the rearguard.
Their estimated arrival is three days from this day, in the morning during the coming of dense fog.
The neighboring feudal lords will merge with them and rebel.
Consult the enclosed documents for the conspiring feudal lords.

In addition, as two men, Evjen and Czeslaw, have been recognized as of the rebel army, they have been judged.

End of Transmission.

* 夜を明かす A possible wordplay by the author. Literally this can mean to spend the night, but overall it can mean to do an all-nighter. Maybe suggesting that Schera’s Cavalry will not rest?

Chapter 20: The Flowers in a Painting Are Inedible but Look Delicious

Flags of the Kingdom's Army were raised all over to obstruct Canaan's main road. On the high ground to the left and right were built instant encampments, and if the Liberation Army were to attack them like this, they would suffer a great deal of damage.
While viewing their encampment through an eyepiece, Ghamzeh in the field headquarters nodded–everything was going according to plan. Arranged into three divisions, the Liberation Army had chosen to line pikemen in the front, then archers, and behind all of them were cavalry . The role of cavalry would be to wrap around and attack from the side, but in this current operation, they were not planned to be used. To their utmost, their main purpose was to attract the enemy's main force.

"I knew it; Canaan is going to be rough. That's almost like a natural fortress. It would probably take a large quantity of soldiers all in one surge to take it down."

The general currently taking command said to Ghamzeh. He was a man of the Belta faction and was an old friend of Ghamzeh's. He was popular and excelled in leadership. What he lacked when he was with the Kingdom was luck and connection to nobility. Just because of that, his road to promotion was closed, and he was sent to a do-nothing job.

"That is correct. But in that state, the enemy's supply train will also have a hard time. In other words, as long as we pressure the main road, they are like rats in a bag. Before long, they will suffocate and die in anguish. It is near impossible for them to procure supply locally after all."

If the unit lead by Colonel Hastie took down Cyrus, they could expect to get their hands on the bag known as Canaan. They were somewhat taking a risk, but even so, it was an operation worth trying. It was for that reason why Diener didn't strongly oppose either.

"If the surprise attack this time goes smoothly, the road to the Royal Capital will instantly be opened. If that happens, Sir Ghamzeh's position in the Liberation Army will also become unshakeable. You will be able to work for Sir Altura more and more."

"Haha, no-no, that doesn't matter to me. I fight only for the Liberation Army's victory."

Said Ghamzeh modestly, making an insincere smile. Presently, the mutual factions were locked sword to sword. To win Altura's trust, he wanted to succeed no matter the cost.

"However, if we just exchange glances like this, they might suspect we are conniving something. I think it is about time we send in the cavalry and provoke them."

The general advised to send in the cavalry. It wasn't a bad idea to test the waters and rain a blow on them.

"You're forbidden to chase too far, and if an attack comes, you are to strictly order an immediate withdrawal. If we're temporarily able to get the enemy to bite, that'll be a good deal. Let's hit them hard."

"Alright, send a messenger to the cavalry unit!"

When Ghamzeh agreed, the general hurled instructions for the cavalry to launch a diversion attack. The messenger nodded, and departed from headquarters. Almost like they were exchanging places, another messenger reported.

"Sir Ghamzeh. Contact from an operative concealed in enemy camp. General Yalder has been accused of violating military regulations, demoted, and sent back to the Royal Capital. He leads the defeated soldiers from Antigua and Belta."

"So General Yalder's also has it hard huh. His establish fame is crumbling isn't it? It's like a lie that he was once known for his Steel Division. I hope I don't end up like him."

"In that respect, it was quite helpful for us. Thanks to his carelessness, we were able to take Antigua."

A general muttered like he was sympathizing, and another general cracked a joke.

"……Fumu."

After reading the report, Ghamzeh crossed his arms. The one currently carrying out defense of Canaan was Field Marshal Sharov. He was acknowledged and established for his profound prudence and steady leadership. Would such a man really decide to split valuable forces before a defensive battle? A bad premonition ran through his head. Should he continue the operation? But, there were too few reasons to stop. He judged that he was too timid.

"What is the matter, Staff Officer Ghamzeh?"

"……No, nothing. I was just thinking a little bit."

"Hahaha, even if you worry, since it's Colonel Hastie, he'll absolutely accomplish his mission. When it comes to fights on hills and fields, he's the greatest in the Liberation Army. Even Colonel Fynn can't outdo him."

"That is true. No matter what it takes, he has to take down Cyrus Fortress. For the Liberation Army's victory. And also for the sake of the oppressed citizens."

Ghamzeh strongly nodded, like shaking off the doubts running through his head. He could order the operation to be discontinued here. But, the time, people, and money invested here would all go down the drain. They would also have to meaninglessly withdraw the large force spread out in front of them. If by chance this was just groundless fear, he would let victory go right under his nose. Stopping an operation once it was put in motion was more difficult than starting it.

(It'll be fine. It'll surely go well. I can't consider stopping after all this. Wouldn't that for sure go along with Diener's expectations? I'll show him; I'll absolutely succeed."

First Army’s Mountain Camp Headquarters.
While looking down at the enemy soldiers, Sharov was stroking his white facial hair. He was convinced that his own judgement wasn’t mistaken. He couldn’t sense from the enemy the spirit that they were going to assault this fortification. From his long years of experience, he would smell out the various moods of the battlefield. He couldn’t explain it with words, but he could understand more or less from the smell. It was an absolutely illogical sensation. But, Sharov had confidence in his own judgement–that their adversaries were waiting for something. Likely, somewhere not here where they were confronting each other. Somewhere where if overlooked would probably be fatal for this Canaan Area.

“Your Excellency. A company of the enemy is coming to attack. Will we intercept them?”

“Ignore them until they enter bow range. If they get even closer, chase them away with spears. Pursuit is unnecessary. There’s no need to get caught in a blatant diversion.”

“Your Excellency! Just staring at them and defending will affect the morale of the soldiers. Please, give my unit the order to attack. Allow me to display that I will absolutely crush them.”

Barbora strongly proposed to Sharov.
His proposal wasn’t too off the mark. If they simply let by the enemy’s provocation, the soldiers would begin to think that the commander had lost his nerve. Before long, this would be tied to a feeling of war weariness and might also become a cause for collapse. Sometimes, the boldness to launch an attack was necessary to maintain morale.

“……Barbora. Your chance will come shortly. Be patient until then.”

“Nevertheless, Your Excellency. Already among the soldiers, a rumor is spreading that we cannot ignore! We ought to make an assertive offensive here!”

Recently, a rumor had begun to spread widely among the soldiers.
Why was Field Marshal Sharov not actively fighting the Liberation Army? Was there some deeper reasoning? Or was there a different reason? They had heard that Sharov was a long-time acquaintance of the rebel army commander Behrouz. They had also heard that he had been invited to rebel in many occasions by the enemy Supreme Commander Altura. Inside the Field Marshal’s heart, maybe he was considering it. Etc.

“Ridiculous. Ignore the idiotic rumors. If we go ahead and launch an attack trying to dispel the rumor, that’ll be to the enemy’s satisfaction. If we leave it alone, it’ll eventually smother out.”

Sharov rebutted and once again looked towards the enemy encampment.
After having sent the dismissed Yalder instructions to stand by, he had sent in another order: ‘In the event of an emergency, move according to your own

judgement; no need to wait for orders.’

Barbora glared loathsomely into the back of Sharov, not at all perturbed. He couldn’t earn great achievements by just defending. Also, he didn’t know if that rumor was authentic or not. Sharov and Behrouz having a relationship close enough to be called best friends was a famous story. In the succession struggle, Sharov had maintained neutrality, and Behrouz had been on the losing side.
Behrouz had contended that the eldest son ought to succeed the throne, but after the current Kristoff won, Behrouz had been exiled. Sharov also privately agreed about the eldest son, but he didn’t want to get involved in the succession, so he had stayed neutral. Hence, he arrived at his current position. If the winners had been reversed, Behrouz should have been the one to sit in the seat of Field Marshal.

With an expression that didn’t conceal his ambition, Barbora clenched his closed fist.

(Whether the rumor is true or not doesn’t concern me. Someday, I will seize you by the tail and pull you down from that seat.)

—-Golbahar Ridge halfway.
While hidden in the dense trees, 3,000 light infantry were silently marching. The fog began to set in, and their field of vision was narrowing. There were people who got lost from the main group.
There were poor footholds, and there was no shortage of unlucky people who slipped. Even though they had been trained, it was meaningless if they couldn’t see. While carefully treading on the ground, they kept walking, forward, and forward.
Standing at the head of the unit, Colonel Hastie had a strange premonition. They weren’t on the wrong road. Their hired guide was also nodding that they were moving as planned. Timing was also part of the plan, so they weren’t very behind schedule. After they descended the ridge, they would run full speed towards Cyrus; that was it.

(What, is this unpleasant ambience. It’s very unlikely due to the fog. It’s almost like —-)

Like criminals heading to the gallows. That kind of ludicrous vision floated in his mind. This should be a road to glory; absolutely not a road to ruin. That’s what he had been told. He was silently, intently pushing forward on the dark, mountain road. He became intimidated.

(I’m thinking too much. I’m a commander; I can’t be daunted.)

He wiped the sweat from his forehead, and forced himself to believe that. He looked back at his subordinates following after him. Everyone’s faces were drooping, and they were marching while silencing their breathing. They were elite soldiers, people chosen who could function even in the mountains, yet despite that, their faces were somewhat gloomy. They didn’t look at all like a unit who would conduct a surprise attack hereafter. They were like defeated soldiers. It wasn’t just him; they too were feeling this repulsive air. They advanced forwards, like trying to shake off the feeling. If they stopped, they wouldn’t ever be able to move again.

The male guide spoke up in a small voice.

"……It's quite rare…for this ridge…to be this silent."

"What do you mean?"

"Huh. Usually, birds will be chirping, and there'll also be things like deer, boars, and other small animals. Yet today I haven't even seen a single one. On the contrary, I haven't even heard the sounds of bugs. ……They may have been crushed, by this… strange chill."

The voices of birds, the voices of bugs, and the voices of animals–not one could be heard. All that could be heard was the occasional passing wind, and their own footsteps only.

"There'll be days like that right? Don't say something so ominous."

"……It's… it's kinda eerie, and it doesn't feel like the same mountain."

The guide with a humble appearance began rubbing both his arms like he was cold. This man had been hired with not a small sum of money. He wasn't particularly connected to the Kingdom or the Liberation Army. If there were greater benefits, any side was fine. Not only that, there was money right in front of his eyes. Hence, he had accepted to be their guide. But, he was regretting it today. If he had to suffer this uncanny atmosphere, he ought to have quietly stayed at home. He wiped the nape of his neck with a towel. Cold sweat honestly felt disgusting.

"……Colonel. Will this… go well for us?"

Seeing the guide scared of something, a soldier softly came to ask. For this man, who had served long enough in the unit to be considered a veteran, to leak a misgiving was rare.
Hastie spontaneously wanted to speak of his uneasiness, but he resisted and answered,

"That will depend on our labor. We'll absolutely pull it off–that kind of enthusiasm is necessary."

"Y, you're right. Please forgive me."

"I understand your tension before a surprise attack. But, you are a veteran. You cannot show your anxiety. Fear is contagious."

"S-Sir!"

Encouraged Hastie, slapping the Veteran's back. If he didn't let out this bravado, he felt like he too would've fretted. He grasped his sword tightly. Stressing agility, the soldiers were armed with swords or javelins. Longer spears weren't carried, as they would hinder the march. Those equipped with bows used shortbows. The rearguard accompanied by the supply train would have their usual weapons, and they would hand them over as soon as they arrived. Due to their load, their marching speed was slow, and Hastie's group acting as the vanguard had to fell Cyrus.

"…..The night will begin to brighten soon. Guide, are we almost there?"

"Y, yeh. Just a little longer. It'll be easier than before hereon. The ground getting more level is proof."

"Good, please continue your good work until we finish descending the mountain. Everyone, persevere a bit more."

Hastie inhaled, and started walking again.

Around when the sky began to grow light, the 3,000 light infantry had finally finished descending the ridge. The fog had already set in, masking the plains near their feet. Before it cleared up, they would march as much as they could, and they had to get close to Cyrus Fortress.
Hastie signaled with his hand, giving the order to advance. Loud voices could not be used. In case there were patrols, there was the danger of being noticed by the enemy.

They had marched for maybe an hour. A silhouette appeared in the fog. A human silhouette riding on a horse. A black flag was fluttering. It seemed to be slowly heading towards them.
Before suspecting it of being an enemy, he considered the possibility of it being an ally. They had imparted to Baron Evjen, who managed the area around Cyrus, their path of march and when they would arrive. Perhaps he had come as reinforcement. Though it would be out of place with their light infantry, it would be heartening if they could use cavalry. They would've already been attacked at this distance if it was an enemy. But just in case, he had his subordinates make preparations for battle.

"Wait to attack until I instruct you to. However, stay prepared."

"Sir."

"Understood."

The infantry unsheathed their swords and took battle positions.

"We are The Fox That Crosses The Ridge. Are you The Fox That Lies In Wait?"

They wouldn't name themselves as the Liberation Army. Several passwords had been established with Evjen beforehand. It was also to prevent friendly fire after taking control of Cyrus. No reply came from the team of horses in front of him. They further approached them. His spoken words should have reached them. If his words were ignored, the possibility they were of the Kingdom's Army was high. Tension ran through the soldiers. To a range inside the fog where they could see, they drew closer and closer.
When he decided to ask one more time, from behind blasted a scream.

"If you do not respond, we will attack! Are you The—-"

"E, enemy attack!! The back of our unit is being attacked by enemy cavalry!!"

“W, what!? T, then these guys are-!!”

When Hastie faced front again, the figure of a female officer on a horse entered his vision. A female wearing black armor that did not suit her body, wielding a large scythe. From her gushed out the accursed feeling that he had felt earlier. It wasn’t bloodthirst nor was it anger. It was a darkish presence hard to describe. While naturally clad in that grim aura, she came before Hastie’s very eyes.
He strengthened his grip on his sword. Cold sweat streamed down his back

(Ahh. That bad sensation I felt, was because of this monster—-)

That female smiled ferociously, and at the same time Hastie swung out his sword, his skull was gouged out by that crooked, evil blade. Fresh blood sprayed into the fog, and a very fantastical spectacle was born.
The female that had killed Hastie, Schera, began silently swinging her scythe. With every swing, the souls of Liberation Army soldiers were reaped.

The scene of red fountains gushing up one after another inside the fog was strongly burned into the minds of the Liberation Army soldiers. The humans of Hastie’s unit who were witnessing that would continue to be tormented by this terror in the future. There would be people who would have mental disorders, and even those who would go insane.
A certain soldier, deciding to leave a record of this beautiful tragedy, madly continued to paint a painting in only red and white. He was confronted by no one; he simply painted endlessly. Before long, he finished one painting, and that soldier slit his throat. In his final moments, after he had signed it with his own blood, he died while laughing loudly.
In the magical fog was a young girl gently picking flowers with slender hands. Her countenance was like a deathly white. From the ground welled up red fountains, drenching the little girl’s feet. In red puddles were drawn many red flowers and white skulls, making observers feel a degenerative fear. In future years, it would be put on display by someone who thought it regrettable to dispose of it, and it would become highly evaluated by nobility.

—-This painting that modeled and was modeled by Schera of the Kingdom’s Army was named: Schera Zade’s Flower Burial.

—-Inside the fog, the one sided slaughter continued.
Inside, where vision was altogether useless, Schera’s Cavalry plagued the light infantry. Before their swords could reach the bodies of the riders, they were skewered by lances, and one, and then another, collapsed. Even so, they desperately resisted, and there was even a brave soldier who pulled a rider down to the ground. But, his resistance was in vain, and many lances opened holes in the Veteran’s body. The surprise attack unit that had lost its commander, now leaderless, decided to turn back to the ridge while inducing panic.
The fog gradually cleared up. An ambush from the Kingdom’s Army was waiting.

“HAHAHA! ALL MY RESENTMENT, WILL BE CLEARED UP HERE-! KILL THE REBEL ARMY!”

“ALL FORCES CHARGE! NOW’S THE TIME TO DISPEL OUR GRUDGE FROM BELTA!”

“OU-!”

From the base of the ridge rose Yalder’s angry words as they commenced the attack, leaping at those going first. Generals of the former Fourth Army also raised their swords, their voices trembling. War drums violently boomed from around the area just to add to their voices.
Having foreseen the rebel army’s path of advance, Yalder sent in Schera’s Cavalry to the front and stationed his United Legion to the side as an ambush. Schera’s Cavalry would halt their advance, and at the same time the fog cleared, he would pincer them. Hastie’s group had marched to their own deaths.
Hastie’s unit collapsed under severe attack from four sides. Of their 3,000, 2,000 were killed, and the survivors scattered, routed, in all four directions.

Furthermore, Yalder, of his own judgement, decided to advance and cross the ridge. His Staff Officer Sidamo also counselled that they ought to take advantage of this opportunity. He sent a messenger to Sharov. Schera’s Cavalry was entrusted with defense of Cyrus, and the United Legion began climbing the ridge at full speed.

“WE’LL GIVE THEM A TASTE OF A DOWNHILL CHARGE; SHOW THEM OUR UNITED LEGION’S ABILITY! ALL THE DEBTS WE OWE, WILL BE CLEARED UP HERE-!”

“LONG LIVE YALDER’S UNITED LEGION! LONG LIVE THE YUZE KINGDOM!”

“ALL UNITS CHARGE! ACHIEVEMENT IS YOURS FOR THE TAKING-! FORWARDD-!”

The 5,000 rearguard of the Liberation Army having been surprise attacked from high ground was thrown into violent disarray. They had no composure to get into rank. Their weapons were adequate, but the movement of the supply unit accompanying them was slow. Riding the momentum of victory, Yalder could not be stopped. Provisions and arms were thrown away, and everyone began retreating for their lives. Yalder’s unit doused the retreating soldiers with an intense rain of arrows and a hail of rocks, and they were successful in inflicting a great deal of casualties.
The brave general did not stop. Yalder’s United Legion descended the ridge while resting, and invaded the Canaan Area from the opposite side. The confrontation in front of Canaan’s main road continued. Yalder showed signs of attacking the Liberation Army’s main force of 30,000 from the side.

Having received the report from the messenger, Sharov also decided to attack.

“We’ll take advantage of this and launch a general offensive. Chase out the rebel army.”

They resolutely sallied out from their secluded mountain camp, and in a fish-scale formation, they faced the Liberation Army. The two sides clashed on the plains.
At first, the battle seemed to unfold favorably for the Liberation Army with superior morale, but the situation reversed when Yalder’s Legion struck them from the side. Cleaving a gap into their formation, the First Army’s vanguard, Barbora’s Division, crushed the enemy infantry units. Taking along his elite guards, he too was swinging his spear, inspiring the soldiers. The Liberation Army’s infantry were killed one after the other.

“MASSACRE THE TRASH OF THE REBEL ARMY-! DON’T LET A SINGLE ONE RETURN

ALIVE-!! THEY'RE A MIX OF SMALL FRY AFTER ALL, THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR-!!"

Ghamzeh of the Liberation Army, deeming anymore was dangerous, decided to loosely retreat. One general spoke up in protest, saying it was still early to give up. The situation was disadvantageous, but they still hadn't been defeated. They had suffered a fierce attack, but their formation of three ranks was still intact. Since the enemy soldiers had come out from their mountain encampment, there was also the choice of toughing it out and waiting for reinforcements.
Since soldiers lead by Altura were on standby at Belta, retreating here would have the same meaning as defeat for the Liberation Army. Their morale was high from successive victories, and they had schemed with the feudal lords. This would have inevitable consequences for their future strategies too. But, Ghamzeh calmly judged the progress of the battle, silenced the general's objection, and ordered a retreat.

"Any more fighting is meaningless. Now that our mainstay, the ridge crossing, has been impeded, it would be best here to retreat. I have all the responsibility. I would like you to follow my instructions."

Strictly ordered Ghamzeh, curbing his boiling anger. Having 30,000 annihilated here would affect their control of Belta. They only had to prevent the very worst situation. That was the duty of Staff Officer who decided the strategies. Making their rearguard cavalry lurk as an ambush, they gradually began to retreat.

Sharov judged that any more pursuit would increase the number of casualties instead. Despite being routed, they were withdrawing while maintaining discipline. If they were tempted and sent out a unit, there was the concern of being surrounded back. Rejecting Barbora's opinion for a full-on pursuit, he ordered to pull back to the mountain encampment.

"Why are we discontinuing the attack here!? If we inflict catastrophic damage here, Belta's recapture would be easy-! Damn it Sharov, forget your concerns! There is a once in a lifetime opportunity right before your eyes, and you want to let it go!!?"

"However, a report from scouts say there are troops in ambush—-"

"You fool-! We'll just give the defeated ambushers the boot! The ones with the more superior power is us! In one more step, can't we drive the enemy's main force to annihilation!?"

Barbora snapped the staff of command he had in his hand. Despite pressured by that threatening attitude, his adjutant reported,

"Sir Barbora. Our allies are pulling back! If we don't also move, that might be seen as a breach of military regulations!"

"Much to my chagrin, I've no choice-! We're withdrawing! ……Sharov you coward-!"

Not agreeing, Barbora hesitated to withdraw till the last, but he finally returned to the camp. Cursing his superior officer all the while.

If Sharov had complied with Barbora's advice here and launched an assault with the entire army, certainly, there was the possibility of the Kingdom's Army achieving victory and gaining a foothold in Belta.

Of course, their forces would be reduced by counterattacks, sufficient enough to cause anxiety that Canaan's defense would be in jeopardy.
Preferring slow and steady, Sharov chose to defend, and was successful in protecting Canaan. But, the Kingdom's Army still continued to have the numerical inferiority, since they weren't able to drive the Liberation Army main force into destruction.
Which choice would've been correct was not known. But just looking at the result, it was victory for the Kingdom's Army, which had crushed the enemy surprise attack.

Having finished fighting, Schera's Cavalry entered Cyrus Fortress as per orders. She let their warhorses rest and everyone recover stamina.
While nibbling bread, Schera headed to the medical clinic. Established inside the fortress, it was a sick clinic for treating disease and the wounded. The cavalrymen wounded in the battle earlier greeted and saluted their superior officer. Among them too were people on beds scattering blood while receiving treatment. It they were generals or nobles, they might be able to receive magical treatment. But for them, normal soldiers, prescribed painkillers were all they would get. A man who bore serious wounds, inside his hazy consciousnesses, was dying. He drifted on the threshold of life and death.

Schera approached a medical soldier wearing a white coat. When his eyes met hers, he regretfully shook his head, and headed towards a bed where another was waiting. When Schera lowered her eyes, a young man with a pallid face was whispering something while his body was twitching.
Schera smiled.

"You did well earlier. Thanks to everyone's efforts, we were able to gain a splendid victory. Hereafter too, fight together with me to kill the rebel army. There's still much fighting after this."

When she caressed his cheek, he turned a reliant gaze towards Schera. But, his gaze was unfocused, and seemed to be looking up somewhere in space. Schera's figure probably no longer entered his vision.

"Lie… Lt. Col… S…Schera. …I… I… I"

He violently vomited blood from his mouth. On the white sheets was spreading a red stain. He had a fatal wound on one of his organs. He did well just being able to make it back here. Through sheer tenacity that he would act alongside his commander until the end, he had made it back here. But, nothing could be done for him in a place like this. No, it would probably be impossible no matter how excellent the doctor. The medical soldier had given him a large quantity of painkiller; there was no other means to take away suffering.
There was only one thing Schera could do. There was only one thing Death could do. While holding *that* in her left hand, she had a candy in her right.

“Hey, you hungry? I have a sweet and yummy candy you know. It’s one that Second Lieutenant Katarina always shares with me though. I took one of those. I’ll share one with you too. How very fortunate of you.”

“Lt. Col….S…Schera—-”

In the mouth of the young man calling out Schera’s name with blank eyes, Schera tossed in the white candy. Then, gently holding his red-stained mouth, she performed the final treatment with her other hand.

“That red candy… looks really good. But that’s something I’ve given to you, so I’ll control myself.”

Schera closed the eyes of the soldier no longer moving, and she lightly smiled. Leaving the red candy that had spilled out of his mouth and fell next to his face, she tucked *that* in her left hand into her waist. Schera waved to the wounded performing a salute around her, and she left the medical clinic.

Schera grandly stretched and annoyingly scowled at the blazing sun. When she looked up above the main tower, next to the Kingdom’s flag was triumphantly fluttering a black flag in the wind. Someone from the cavalry had arbitrarily mounted it probably. Tearing the completely stale bread into fine pieces, she threw them into her mouth.
A black crow from somewhere came along to her feet. When she threw just a bit of bread crumbs at the ground, it began hopping, pecking at the ground. It looked up at Schera and cawed, as if wanting something.

“I don’t have anymore food to give you crow. Don’t be lazy and go get your own. After all, you can fly freely in the sky.”

With nothing left to do, Schera turned and left, having eaten everything remaining. The crow watched her leave with eyes not feeling like it. Losing interest before long, the crow flew away, heading towards a place of rest.

—-Afterwards, until Katarina came to call her, Schera passed the time and took a refined nap atop the watchtower. There were a mountain of things to do, like sending a report to Sidamo, but deciding not to care, Schera left them to her excellent adjutant.
Next to her stubbornly loitered the crow that had failed at procuring food earlier.

Chapter 21: Sardines are Salty and Delicious

Belta Castle, in the middle of an audience.
The generals were arrayed, while the defeated general Ghamzeh was prostrating himself, rubbing his face against the floor.
All the responsibility was on him, who had command and conducted the operation. There had been a chance to halt the operation: the news that Yalder's division had been relocated. He ought to have temporarily stopped the march and performed a detailed reconnaissance.
Ghamzeh's regret was bottomless. Everything had come to naught. After this, Diener would no doubt have complete hegemony.

"I, the lousy Ghamzeh, have faulted, despite being entrusted with soldiers from the Princess. I have no excuses. I am prepared to accept any condemnation. As well as to maintain discipline, please inflict punishment on this worthless me."

"You are mistaken, Ghamzeh. The one who ordered you to carry out the mission was I. You and your men have fought bravely for me. I would like you to lend me your strength from hereon as well. Please do not be rash; the battle will yet continue."

"Princess. Morale cannot be preserved in that case. In times like this especially, it is vital to not let a fault go unpunished. I beg of you, please give me judgement. Sympathy is unnecessary."

Objected Ghamzeh, the words almost bursting out of him. He was prepared to absolve the Belta faction's mismanagement via his death.
Understanding that, Diener came to his aid. He was doing this as an investment. Ghamzeh himself was clearly not a fool. He had connections in the Royal Capital Area and had talent able to draft plans. This time ended in a failure, but in a sense, they were successful in driving a wedge into Canaan, since hereafter, the Kingdom's Army now had to also allocate defence forces to Cyrus.

"Sir Ghamzeh. It's folly to throw away your life after only one defeat. There is only one victory in this war: When we liberate the Royal Capital and overthrow the despotic government. Your strength is still very much necessary. I, Diener, respectfully request of you, please, for the sake of the Liberation Army, lend us your power."

Diener took the hand of Ghamzeh, who still had his head down, and made him rise to his feet. It was all an act. But, to appeal to those around them that there were no hostile feelings between factions, it was a necessary act.
With this, Ghamzeh would for the time being become docile. During this lull, Diener planned on crushing the Belta faction.
That faction, comprised of former men of the Kingdom, was throwing their weight around, acting as they pleased, and they had forgotten for what reason they were in this liberation war. The project for the southern part of the Kingdom was happening at the same time, and they needed to speed it along. What was important was that everyone's wills were united with Altura's. These were Diener's true feelings, who had once part of the Salvador faction. On the dawn where they salvaged the monarchy, they needed to press forward a host of reforms, and that wouldn't go smoothly unless everyone was united.

“Still, to have laid its hands on so many of our like-minded brethren, what is that Death God? Voleur, Borjek, Hastie. Everyone of them had been brave men. For them to have been killed so easily, even now I can’t believe it.”

“Lieutenant Colonel of the Kingdom’s Army, Schera Zade. A female officer not even 20 leading a cavalry unit of the former Third Army. According to surrendered officers, she originally grew up in a farming village and personally applied for enlistment. She is a pitiful human who has fallen off the path she ought to have walked. She knows not justice and merely drowns herself in killing. Parts of her may deserve our sympathy, but we cannot overlook anymore of her transgressions.”

Diener calmly recited her background, but inwardly, he was seething in boiling rage. She was a human Diener knew in detail. He intended to kill her in the next battle without fail. That prowess of hers was certainly a threat, but after all, she was an incompetent girl who knew nothing except offense.
If they laid a trap and surrounded her, they could absolutely kill her. He had heard exhaustively from her former adjutant, Vander, that she wasn’t knowledgeable about the art of war. After he killed Schera, he would tear her body limb from limb, and then his rage would finally settle, maybe.
A carefully thought out, scrupulous plan should not be defeated by an individual’s reckless bravery. He would absolutely not recognize such a thing.

“……A simple soldier born in a farming village promoted to Lieutenant Colonel within a few years? Despite being a woman, to have that degree of prowess on her. Truly hard to believe. I can only bow my head to her fame as a Death God.”

Behrouz muttered while stroking his white facial hair.

“……Please leave the matter about the Death God to me. I will wait for an opening and carry out the bitterness of our killed comrades. Please allow me to show you. Sir Ghamzeh, at that time, please by all means give me your ‘cooperation.’”

“……Understood, Sir Diener. I, Ghamzeh, will devote myself to the Liberation Army hereon as well.”

Ghamzeh had been silent for a short while, but he finally lowered his head deeply and agreed.

“Thank you, Ghamzeh. I will be relying on you from here on. ……Diener. How ought we progress from here?”

Asked Altura, and Diener answered without missing a beat.

“Sir-. We will soon be visited by the harsh winter. We will prepare our forces during that time, and first, let us reconstruct the lives of the civilians. The good news is that the enemy general Sharov will persist in being on the defense. It is hard to believe that he will launch an attack on us. If for example he does come, it will be a simple matter to stop him in his tracks. The snow is the strongest bulwark for us. Right now, we should gather those who agree in our cause, train the troops, and spread the word of our great cause widely to the world.”

As the saying goes: “Rich country, strong army.” Currently, the Liberation Army’s plan was to devote themselves to that. Having exhausted much of their war potential,

gathering strength took utmost priority.

"In that case, you are saying that we will wait until the advent of spring to aim for the Royal Capital?"

"Yes. We will move out after that. The Empire, who has been bestowing upon us their support, is attempting to capture Madros Fortress in the Kingdom's northwest. Even with winter here, they will grant the Kingdom's Army no reprieve."

Prince Alan nodded at those words. The man closest to the throne, Prince Alexander, was on an expedition accompanied by 100,000 soldiers.
Alexander had invaded, leading the Firth Army Corps and taking along the Seventh Army Corps that was defending Wealth Fortress in the Empire's northeast. He was Alan's older brother, and a fine man in the eyes of his father, the Emperor. He could handle everything flawlessly and was skillful in grasping a man's true nature. Once this campaign succeeded, his position and status would probably become unshakeable. For Alan right now though, this matter wasn't of much concern.

"Since my older brother, Alexander, is leading them, they will capture Madros without fail. If they posture to attack the Royal Capital, the defense of Canaan should also become thinner. It would be to our advantage to gather strength and wait for a good opportunity I believe."

Hearing Alan's words, Altura encouragingly nodded. When she looked at Behrouz for affirmation, he too didn't have an objection it seemed.

"The plan is decided. Everyone, I would like you all to strive to do your very best and work for the realization of our dreams. I will also devote everything I have."

"Sir-, please leave it to me!"

Everyone left. After ascertaining that Altura and Alan were starting to have an intimite sounding conversation, Diener also departed for his own room.
There were so many things he needed to do. The more time there was, the easier he could carry out his schemes. The next time they attacked Canaan, it would surely fall. But, because their opponent was Sharov, they would probably be drawn into a long battle with many sacrifices. That composed and reliable man must first be taken out of the equation. That man had the conceit and belief that if he bunkered down, he could defend the strategic position of Canaan against anything. And, he would be correct.
For the Liberation Army, it would be expedient if they could lure out the thoughtless Kingdom's Army and crush them.

(……It's about time Field Marshal Sharov ought to retire. Apologies to the general Behrouz, but I've not the luxury to entertain his personal feelings.)

He had already sown the seeds for that very purpose. The only thing left was to induce them to bud. This kind of machination was Diener's specialty. Diener's lips curled, and he began writing a detailed, secret message to give instructions to his agents.

Having successfully defended Cyrus, Schera's Cavalry and Yalder's United Legion was headed for the Kingdom's northwest under Sharov's orders.
In the Kingdom's northwest, Madros Fortress was the foremost frontline with the Empire. To their west was Wealth Fortress under Empire dominion, and the two had a long-standing history of conflict.
As for Canaan, Sharov had set up in Roshanak Fortress, Barbora was on front line security, and Laus was moved to defense of Cyrus Fortress.
As he had no plans to launch an offense in the winter season, surplus soldiers were sent back to the Royal Capital. There were soldiers gathering fatigue and dissatisfaction.
Barbora called for an offensive in the winter season, but Sharov had rejected it, saying the risk was too high. In the winter, even the transport of supplies would be difficult.

Incidentally, Yalder had earned spectacular contributions, having repulsed the enemy's surprise attack unit, crossed the ridge, defeated the rear guard, and struck the enemy main camp from the side, but unfortunately, he was not approved to be reinstated to General. Sharov's report to the King was dismissed, and Yalder was given a directive that he would be reinstated depending on his future activity. Yalder was once again dispirited, but he roused himself, saying that he'd overcome this adversity, and pumped himself up alone.
Similarly, Schera's promotion was also thrown out the window. Thinking that a promotion to Colonel was indeed going too far, she was told, "Later."
The man who expressed that worry was Prime Minister Farzam. He felt apprehensions at a person he had never met before climbing the ranks amidst resounding applause. It was likely that the birth of a hero would threaten his own position.
Schera herself didn't mind at all, and she indulged in a meal as always. From the start, an immediate meal was much more important than promotion.
Schera was right now eating sausage with onions, and well-boiled vegetables like carrots. There was a stupidly large amount of edible grass, so Schera's face twisted as she dealt with them. Katarina was in a good mood and seemed to really enjoy eating them, so she transferred the grass on her own plate to Katarina's. She definitely didn't like grass-type foods, and she also didn't really like bitter foods.

—-Northwest of the Kingdom, Madros Area Headquarters, Madros Castle.
"Well well, if it isn't a Former Candidate for Field Marshal, His Former Excellency, Former-General Yalder. So you were still doggedly living! Man that stubbornness is going to make you go bald! Hahaha-!"

Coming out to meet the arrived Yalder was the boorishly laughing commandant of the Fifth Army, Lieutenant General Kerry Madros.
While patting his completely bald head, he bade the indignant Yalder to sit.

Violently sitting in a seat, Yalder shouted without reserve, loudly in a voice that would even reach the heavens.

"I don't want to be told about going bald by you, you filthy baldy!"

"It's easier to put on a helmet like this ya know. The time when you'll understand will come sooner or later. That's if you can keep that head of yours on! Wahahahaha-!!"

Kerry laughed, and the officers inside the room also laughed. They were all brave men that Kerry had expectations for, and they were overflowing with spirit to fight to the end. The Fifth Army was a heterogeneous army united by inhabitants of the Madros Area. They would never submit to the Empire.

"You-you ingrates-! You would even insult me! Even though I expressly came here as reinforcements, what treatment is this-! My god everyone's making fun of me!"

Yalder slammed the desk. His face was becoming as red as a lobster.

"Man, calm down Yalder. We're the same rank now, so can't we have a more casual talk? General and Lieutenant General are pretty much the same thing. The two don't really matter to me. Don't you think so? C'mon, drink, drink."

Kerry poured alcohol while patting Yalder's shoulder. The cold of the northwest was fierce, and the alcohol would offer some warmth.
Snow hadn't yet fallen, but it was cold enough to pierce the skin. Normally, one wouldn't think of starting a war during this time.
Yalder downed the drink. He took a deep inhale, and then exhaled, making himself calm down. He had known this man quite awhile. Kerry made fun of people and had an extremely displeasing character. Even so, he was greatly popular amongst the soldiers and excelled in valor–truly a disagreeable man.

"…….Ah screw this. I'm moving to the main topic. How far have those guys from the Empire come?"

"Hm? Ahh, the retards of the Empire huh. Even though it's now this damn cold winter, those guys ain't gonna pull back. We fought, intending to hold out until the winter, all for nothing. The cause of all this is thanks to that shithead that moved David's Army Corps."

The Fourth Army, which had been led by the now deceased David, and Kerry's Fifth Army had maintained resistance in this area. Thanks to the fool of the Royal Capital recklessly moving them, they were in this state. If they naively secluded themselves in their new fortresses that should have been a bulwark against the Imperial Army, they would probably be soundly annihilated. Kerry had readily abandoned the now-useless, recently-completed First Fort, and he brought them into a war of attrition while evacuating the civilians. He began conducting guerrilla warfare, using every advantage and means he had, to interfere with the enemy's supply train. To that effect, they had halted the enemy's advance and were successful in holding out until winter.

"…….Kerry. About Sir David, unfortunately at Belta…"

"Ahhh, I know. He wasn't a very careful man, but man he had an eye for liquor. The liquors he chose were really delicious. Only shame there is. Yeah, truly regrettable."

There was no reason why David, boastful of his family lineage, and Kerry, whose birthplace was in the backwater Madros Area, would get along well. That being said, the two never got into any mutual conflict, and they had a relationship where to the best of their ability they tried not to interfere with each other. The liquor David had sent to him as courtesy had been unexpectedly delicious.

"……Is the story about Prince Alexander being the Supreme Commander of the Imperial Army true?"

"Yeh, he's probably earning points to secure the throne. Those guys' enthusiasm is the real deal. The bastards from the Wealth family also came to invade us with steam coming out of their noses. It's irritating like you wouldn't believe."

Lieutenant General Gustav Wealth was the commander of the Seventh Army Corps from the Wealth Area in Empire territory. He was a sworn enemy that Kerry had a grudge against extending back to his ancestors.
Kerry, to protect the Madros Area, and Gustav, to protect the Wealth Area, had a relationship where they mutually killed and were killed.
They had a bloodstained, inseparable relationship that had been going on from 200 years past. This fate was also the foremost reason why Kerry and his company would not surrender to the Imperial Army.
If Gustav were to take control of the Madros Area, he would surely take revenge for all that had happened. If their positions were reversed, Kerry would too. After all this, there would be no pretty settlement. It was kill or be killed. This would possibly continue until their foe's city was destroyed. Before they were killed, they had to kill. That was the feudal lord's duty.
The beginning of this hatred was said to have stemmed from surrendered Madrosian civilians being killed, or Madrosians killing surrendered Wealthian civilians–at this point, no one knew whose viewpoint was correct. No one even wanted to know. No matter how it turned out, the Madros family was with the Kingdom, and the Wealth family was with the Empire. That was it.
There was a habit of Madrosians tattooing a guardian beast on their breasts. Wealthians would carve a sacred bird on their shoulders. The irony was that these became symbols used to distinguish their ethnicity and ended up further fanning the flames of their mutual hostility.

"……Despite it almost being winter, they show no signs of withdrawing?? 100,000 is a huge army. It must be challenging just to maintain it."

"Even so, they're invading us with energy to spare. The Prince himself is leading them after all. That's a place to make a name for yourself. They're coming though we're withdrawing while burning all the crops we've carefully raised. Goes without saying we ain't even leaving a scrap for them to eat; we're turning every piece into charcoal. Winter's here, and after their supply line gets shaky lies our true victory. We'll show those Imperial idiots hell."

The Fifth Army had evacuated all the residents on the Imperial Army's route of invasion, poisoned the wells, burned the fields, and killed the livestock. They would give not a thing to the Imperial soldiers. This methodology was shared not just by Kerry and the soldiers, but even down to the citizens themselves.
If they were caught, they would be savaged and killed. Precisely because they knew that ad nauseum, there was not a single person who said no to it.

Kerry drained the liquor in his glass and grasped it tightly. Yalder had also unintentionally strengthened his grip. He looked at the map spread out atop the desk and rubbed his jaw.

"Northwest from Madros is the Second Fort, to the west is the Third Fort, and to the Southwest is the Fourth Fort huh. The Second Fort is along the coast, and the Third is tightly surrounded by mountains. The Fourth then is Madros's weakest spot–it's on the plains and would be the easiest to fall. If it were me, I would target the Fourth Fort."

Yalder prefered frontal attacks. Without any thought, he chose the Fort easiest to attack. If he had a large army and no worry for supply, he wouldn't be mistaken. There was no need to go out of their way and attack a difficult location. There were times too when it would be necessary to prepare for losses and go for a head-on attack with just power.
Kerry asserted that the Fourth Fort would not be a problem. He had the resolve and confidence that they would defend it to the end.

"Accordingly, it was made the most robust. Man, it ain't gonna fall that easily. I've personally taken command there after all. Yo Yalder. I plan on having you head to the Second Fort at the coastlands. Under it lies a path to the provisions storehouse. If that Fort falls, the Fifth Army and your own Legion will fall into a predicament. It's a dangerous place though, how 'bout it?"

Kerry pointed out the Second Fort build along the coast. It was a barrier built to obstruct the main road. But, it was difficult to call it sturdy, and if siege weapons were brought into the equation, it would be difficult to hold out.

"That's basically giving me a great position. I, Yalder, and my glorious United Legion, will assuredly defend the Fort; allow us to show you. Also, I'll make those guys in the Royal Capital recognize my activities this time for sure!"

While amusedly watching Yalder grinding his teeth and pumping himself up, Kerry smiled. He knew that Yalder wouldn't agree with his plan, but they were old acquaintances, so he wouldn't be rejected. Yalder would undoubtedly be enraged and hit him.

"Man, don't be so hasty, Yalder. Let me finish. This is a duty that only you guys can do. A job I can only entrust to the demoted Lieutenant General Yalder and his defeated, miserable United Legion. Make suuure to listen with that pig brain of yours. I won't forgive failure. A'right?"

"The heck you say? Making a grave face all of a sudden, are you insulting not just me but even my troops!? If it's something stupid, I won't forgive you!"

"Here's the plan—-"

Lowering his voice, Kerry explained to Yalder. Before he finished speaking, Yalder flew into a rage and punched him with his right fist, and Kerry retaliated with a headbutt; the conference room became chaotic. The officers around only egged them on, showing no signs of stopping them, and the two Lieutenant Generals continued their fist fight, leaving as many bruises on each other's faces as they could. The current situation was much like two drunkards brawling violently in a tavern. The horseplay

continued until Sidamo, hearing of the ruckus, brought along guards to break them up.
Just as Kerry had anticipated. He gave Yalder's body a glance, and it was full of wounds. As far as he could tell, they weren't very serious. It goes without saying that Kerry was in a similar state.

—-Night, several days later.
Leaving behind the Second Fort with flames reaching to the sky, Schera leading her 2,000 cavalry was heading for the Imperial Army's encampment.
On the soldiers' horses were fastened the heads of 100 soldiers of the Kingdom.
Furthermore, bound hand and foot with rope was the second son of the Madros family, Darus Madros.
He was gagged and his face swelled with bruises, and there were traces of having been a struggle. He would be an offering to the Imperial Army, a sacrifice.

"Katarina. Are we almost there I wonder."

"Sir-. There are signs of scouts in the vicinity. It seems we were caught sight of."

"Oh. According to plan then. Raise it."

When she gave the instructions to the cavalry behind her, they tied a white cloth to their spears and raised it high.
It was the universal sign of surrender, a white flag. Schera's Cavalry raised many of them conspicuously and continued to march.

Schera chewed on the head of a dried sardine, Madros's local specialty. It was a food for the masses, and so they could take in precious salt, it was extremely salty. It wasn't often eaten by itself, and it wasn't intended to be. The correct way of eating it was to put it in a soup.
Schera's face puckered in saltiness. Katarina extended a water flask, but Schera shook her head and declined.
She took out one more from a bag, and this time sucked on it from the tail. A bitter taste spread inside her mouth.

"I wonder if the Imperial Army has any delicious food. I'm pretty excited."

"In this season, I believe you should not hold such high expectations. Likely—-"

Katarina was going to bring up Wealth's local product, but infantry from the surrounding thickets jumped out menacingly, interrupting her.
They raised their torches and intimidatingly turned their pikes towards the cavalry.
Schera instantly crushed the dried sardine. She crunched it into small pieces, the small bones making cracking sounds. After a bitter taste came out the salty taste, and Schera's face crumbled in saltiness again.

"Halt-! Stop your horses-!!"

“Don’t move! Don’t you dare move! Any suspicious movements and we’ll kill you on the spot-!”

“Soldiers of the Kingdom huh!? Do you know what that white flag means!?”

While everyone shouted in loud voice, they intimidated Schera and her group. The cavalry showed no unrest, and they were waiting for their commander’s orders. Not even the horses made a sound. The Imperial soldiers observed this strange cavalry with suspicious glances. Normally, these types of people would be cowering in fear. The patrol unit’s commander, after cleared his throat, addressed them in a bellowing voice.

“We are a patrol unit of the Keyland Empire’s Seventh Army Corps! On what business have you men come here!? Depending on your answer, we will launch an attack-! It would behoove you to answer carefully-!”

At that question, Schera had her horse take a step forward and replied quietly, but penetratingly.

“I am Lieutenant Colonel Schera Zade, cavalry affiliated with the Yuze Kingdom’s Special United Legion. To surrender to the Keyland Empire, we have set fire to the Second Fort and taken captive a man of the Madros family. I would like to meet with the commander of the Imperial Army. We have no place to return.”

At Schera’s signal, her cavalry flung the heads they were carrying. The Imperial soldiers picked them up to examine them.
Far in front of them, they could see a red light blotting the night sky. There were certainly flames rising from around the Second Fort.
When the commander of the patrol unit made sure of that, he glared at Schera while alert.

“……You’re not a Madrosian, are you?”

The people of Madros would never surrender. In other words, if they were Madrosians, he intended to kill them here. There were many of the Empire’s Seventh Army Corps that were born in the Wealth Area. This commander was a Wealthian.

“I was born in the Central Border Zone; what about it?”

“……No, I get it. However, it is not in my power to accept your capitulation. I will guide you from here to headquarters, and you should explain your circumstances there. Don’t have any strange intentions. We aren’t the only soldiers around here.”

“I appreciate it. Please guide us then.”

“This way. Follow me.”

At Schera’s prompt, the commander guided them and started walking. Spearmen and bowmen were in formation with weapons ready surrounding the cavalry. If there was any suspicious behavior, they would probably immediately fire their arrows and strike with their spears. The cavalrymen showed no fear, and silently followed Schera. Unnoticed, the white flags had been replaced by black ones, with ominous birds depicted on them. Their prides probably couldn’t bear it; there was no defeat for Schera’s Cavalry. The Imperial soldiers didn’t notice at all.

Giving them a glance, Schera's mouth warped in great amusement.

"—-I'm *really* looking forward to this."

Chapter 22: Because Wealth Potatoes Fill the Stomach, Delicious

At the Imperial Army Campground, brilliantly illuminated by campfires, a war council was being conducted to decide their plan to capture Madros. The foremost specialists in every field were mustered full force around the commandant of the First Corps, the first prince of the Empire, Alexander Keyland.
Alexander was clothed in luxurious war garments, and a sword laid with excessive ornaments was tucked into his waist. He also had gold hair, a symbol of the Keyland family, inherited from his father. The Keyland family heavily valued, almost fanatically, that gold color. If things went wrong and the child was born with silver hair even, his right to the throne would likely be revoked, even if he was the eldest son.
If Alexander inherited the imperial throne, these elite commissioned officers would probably become his advisors. They were all without exception personally selected by Alexander, and they were men who excelled in ingenuity and valor.
But right now, everyone had heavy faces, making one feel the grave situation.

"What happened to the provisions supply?"

Alexander gently asked, while tapping his finger on the desk.

"Sir-, the fields have all been reduced to ashes, and the houses in the farming villages are completely empty. Poison has been thrown into the wells currently. Those guys have been thorough in their scorched earth tactics."

"So it is extremely hard to raise supplies locally. We must request them to be transported from our home country."

"Commando units of the Kingdom's Army have repeatedly raided our Army's conveys. If we split soldiers to their defense, it might hinder our supply train hereafter I believe."

Their supply line had stretched out accompanying their invasion of Kingdom territory. Kerry's Fifth Army had switched to guerrilla warfare and were meticulously obstructing their supply line repeatedly. Currently, the amount of supplies that reached the front lines safely wasn't even 50%. At this rate, there would probably be a serious deficiency of provisions.

"……Your Excellency. We have captured the First Fort. What do you think of waiting here until the spring season? The transportation of goods will progress, and our marching speed will also increase. There is no need for us to hastily attack any further."

One general proposed to halt the march. It was an opinion laced with reason, and Alexander also inwardly thought that the best course of action.
But, he was in a situation where he couldn't stop. He had been given an overriding order: "Capture Madros at all costs."
It was an order from his father, and at the same time, the Emperor, Alf Keyland. As he grew older, he became more incapable of flexible thinking. Even so, until he gained the throne, Alexander couldn't incur his displeasure.

"If I could, I wouldn't have made a campaign in this season from the beginning. His Majesty commands that we make Madros fall as soon as possible. Our focus should be on how we break through the enemy line of forts and sink Madros. Gentlemen, rack your brains for me."

Declared Alexander in a strong tone. Responding to him, Lieutenant General Gustav, commander of the Seventh Corps, remarked.

"To have a large army of 100,000 men march any further is an act of suicide. I believe we ought to put the ordinary soldiers on defense of the First Fort and escort for the supply convoys. 50,000 elite of the First and Seventh Corps will launch a concentrated attack on one point of the line of forts, break through, and make Madros Castle fall in one fell swoop. This is best I believe."

A slender and paranoid man, Gustav was the lord of the Wealth Area, and at the same time, he also led the Seventh Corps. He had crossed swords with Kerry who governed Madros many times in small skirmishes.
He was deeply distrustful, and a man who exemplified discretion and composure. He was fundamentally indifferent to strangers, but the soldiers born in Wealth held him in high esteem. He continued to fight and live only for the protection and growth of Wealth.

Soldiers with a low amount of training would be put on standby, and despite being on a conquest, they would continue to march with only the necessary numbers. In this situation where provisions were insecure, Gustav's opinion was appropriate.
The Fifth Army of the Kingdom had roughly the same numbers on defense of their fort line, but they had to scatter their defenses.
The Imperial Army had the privilege of choosing their course of march. Where would they aim? That question would decide Madros's fate for certain.

"What a pragmatic plan that is. Without food, we cannot fight, and we cannot stupidly advance. Afterwards, all we can do is pray for good luck. Luckily, I am an ardent adherent to the Star Church. We certainly will have divine protection."

Alexander gave a cynical-feeling, sarcastic laugh and drained his glass of water. He didn't believe in the thing called religion. But saying that aloud was akin to heresy, so he just didn't say it. Being able to believe brought rank, money, and power. If he could be saved just by believing, that wasn't very fun. That's why he aimed for the throne that possessed everything. He made maximum use of the good fortune that he was born as the eldest son, and he devoted himself to study with no rest until he almost bled.
That had been recognized, and he was now one step away from his prize, the throne. He could not fail here. There were countless people aiming for the throne.
The only one he could relax his guard around was his real younger brother, Alan, who had quickly withdrawn from the competition to earn the throne and had ran away from the Imperial Capital to join the Liberation Army. Once Alexander acquired the throne, he intended on calling him back and giving him an important managerial position.
Now that the rough plan had been decided, they moved to deliberating how to capture their most important target when a messenger rushed in from the campgrounds.The bodyguards in heavy armor around them crossed their long spears, hindering the messenger's path. Alexander ordered them to let him through. The messenger was aware he was being impolite yet he entered in. It was probably an

urgent report, Alexander predicted.

“We’re in the middle of a war council. What’s the matter?”

“Sir-, A cavalry unit from the Kingdom’s Army has come to surrender. They number 2,000 riders. The commander is a female officer, and she has come forward wanting an audience with Your Highness. “

“Hohh? Isn’t that good news. Don’t you think so? Gustav.”

Interested, Alexander’s lips warped, and he addressed Gustav. He knew that Gustav held feelings more intense than hatred towards Madrosians. He was testing what reaction Gustav would have.
Gustav frowned. Madrosians would never obey the Empire. If they untactfully allowed an audience, that might pose a danger to Alexander.

“……Is that female commander you spoke of a Madrosian?”

“No, she says she is from the Central Border Zone. Also, she has brought someone related to the enemy commandant, Darus Madros.”

“Darus you said!? Isn’t he the son of that vexing Kerry!?”

“It’s rude to keep them waiting too long wouldn’t you say? How about we meet them immediately? A female officer leading cavalry of the Kingdom’s Army huh. How truly amusing.”

“……Take their weapons. Bring only the female officer, and impose a strict surveillance. We must pay maximum caution so there’s not even a one-in-a-million chance of something befalling His Highness. Absolutely do not take your eyes off their behavior.”

Gustav stringently ordered the bodyguards. They saluted and began implementing his orders. If they allowed injury to the Prince, they would lose their lives.

“How prone to worrying you are, Gustav. You won’t live a long life like that.”

“It is thanks to this personality that I have consequently lived this long. If she appears suspicious, I will show her no mercy. Treat her as an enemy when you meet with her, Your Highness. Behind her smile may be concealed a sword.”

“You don’t have to tell me, I know. This kind of thing leaves a bad taste in my mouth.”

Alexander expressionlessly nodded. Behind smiles lurked desire… and treachery. He had been in contact with such dirty feelings since he was young. He had faith in his ability to smell out schemes.

While surrounded by layers of armed guards, Schera was brought to the tent

Alexander was in. Spearheads were pointed towards her, and if she made any suspicious movements, she would be immediately skewered. While disinterestedly looking at them, Schera was walked with her scythe carried on her shoulder.
In front of the tent, she was stopped by two bodyguards wearing splendorous armor. It was unrealistic to be admitted through while bearing a weapon.

"Halt. Ahead of us is a tent for those of a particular high class. You are not allowed through while holding such a dangerous thing."

"Should I give this to you, I wonder?"

Schera tapped the scythe on her shoulder. A bodyguard nodded with an unpleasant expression.

"……That scythe will be put under my custody. Don't make any impolite pretenses."

The bodyguard went to roughly take the scythe, but at its disproportionate weight, he unintentionally dropped it. The large scythe was heavier than it looked, such that even lifting it was arduous. He couldn't believe that the small figured girl in front of his eyes had been carrying it. She had been easily carrying it on her shoulder.

"Fufu-, you okay? It seems like your hands are shaking though. You shouldn't push yourself unreasonably. You'll whittle down your soul."

"—-Y, your concern is unnecessary. Come, you should enter quickly. His Highness is waiting."

When Schera entered inside the tent, in its center was a gold-haired, young man sitting in a seat. To his sides stood merely ten men, all decorated imposingly with medals. Then, surrounding the area were tensed bodyguards with glittering eyes. Of course, they were stationed behind Schera too.
Schera boldly walked inside all of them and reverentially kneeled at place slightly distanced in front of the young man.

"You're the one who wanted to join our Imperial Army? You seem surprisingly young though."

"Sir-, I am called Schera Zade. Rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Kingdom. I command cavalry. I have come at this occasion wanting to be a member of the Imperial Army."

Alexander looked down at Schera. At a glance, she appeared to just be a normal little girl wearing armor. But, there was no way such a person could command 2,000 cavalry. Above all else, despite coming to this place, basically hostile territory, he perceived no manner of unrest. It seemed she possessed considerable mental strength.

"Despite having the body of a woman, you acquired the position of Lieutenant Colonel at that age. It's apparent you are quite capable. I'd like you to tell me just what about the Kingdom dissatisfies you. I'd like to hear your reason for surrender."

"My activities were not properly valued, and also, the Kingdom has no future. Its interior is rotten, and the higher-ups only think about themselves. They are not worth

fighting for and risking my life. I also lead 2,000 soldiers. I only want to avoid dying futilely."

Schera bitterly criticized the Kingdom. Then, she put her hand in her breast pocket and took out a letter sealed with wax. She handed it over to a bodyguard lingering next to her.
Alexander took the letter and asked,

"……This letter is?"

"From my superior officer, Yalder. He is currently serving as the defense commander for the Second Fort. If his rank and position is guaranteed, he will vacate the Fort and promptly surrender. The flames rising from the Second Fort serves as proof of that."

The generals were astir. If that was true, this was an unparallelled opportunity.
Alexander broke the seal and scanned the letter.
[I have received an insult like no other with no regard to how I have loyally served, and therefore, I would like to surrender. If you can guarantee my position and the lives of the castle garrison, I promise to throw open the gates of the Second Fort without resistance.
In a location slightly eastward of the Fort is concealed the Kingdom's food storehouse. An attack there with a simultaneous attack on Madros Castle could inflict catastrophic damage.], it said. A detailed map had even been courteously attached.
Alexander handed the letter over to the generals, and the inside of the tent instantly erupted in excitement.

"Hold on-! It's still early to take this as fact. There are things we ought to confirm with this officer. Messenger soldier! Bring Darus and several prisoners from the Kingdom's Army-!"

"Sir-!"

Thundered Gustav at the excited generals. It was still too early to take this as truth. If this was a fake surrender, they would be the ones to fall into a predicament.
Gustav did not trust Schera at all. There was no emotion in this girl's words. It wouldn't be strange for her to attack them the next moment. Indeed, he couldn't feel any humanity in her. Even when he glared at her with a gaze laden with killing intent, she calmly eluded it off.
It wasn't something a young, female soldier should be able to brush off. Gustav was cautious.
Alexander was silently watching the chain of events unfold. Perfect timing to ascertain her sincerity, he thought.

"Lieutenant Colonel, excuse this discourtesy, but there is first something I'd like to check. On your breast, is there a tattoo of a beast?"

Enquired Gustav to Schera. There was no better proof of a Madrosian. If there was a tattoo on her breast, any more conversation was unnecessary. He would immediately kill her.
Schera silently unfastened her chestplate and slowly exposed her breast. There was no wound on her withered body, let alone a tattoo.

"Is this enough? If you like, I will take everything off."

The generals averted their eyes from Schera's body. As one would expect, fixedly staring would go against chivalry.

"……I apologize for Gustav's discourtesy, Lieutenant Colonel. I understand you are not a person of Madros. Gustav, do you agree?"

"Sir-, I, Gustav, had just thought too much it seems. Lieutenant Colonel, forgive my distrust."

When Alexander apologized, Schera said nothing and expressionlessly fixed her appearance. She showed no feelings of shame or anger.

Before long, Darus, bound with rope and gagged, and several prisoners of war were brought into the tent.
When the bodyguards took off the gags, Darus turned around and spewed profanity towards Schera. He had been attached to the Second Fort, but Schera had assaulted him out of nowhere, and in the end, he was taken captive.

"Schera! What is the meaning of this-!!? Are you betraying the Kingdom that promoted you from a private to Lieutenant Colonel!!? You filthy traitor! It's because of ungrateful whores like you that we're in this hell-!"

"You're in front of His Highness. Restrain your mouth, you son of a bitch."

"You pig of Wealth! My father with exterminate your family-, nay, he'll butcher all of you Wealthians-!"

"Silence-! You dog of Madros-!!"

Gustav kicked his face with all his strength, and Darus collapsed while coughing blood. He rose and started cursing Alexander this time, so he was gagged again. The other prisoners were similarly forced to kneel, and their heads pushed to the ground.

"—-Your Highness. How about leaving their execution here to Lieutenant Colonel Schera? We'll make this a chance for her to demonstrate her loyalty to the Empire. Lieutenant Colonel, of course you won't say no right?"

"Good thinking Gustav. Lieutenant Colonel Schera, this is your first mission. Execute these vermin. These are shameless men who once surrendered and then conspired to desert again. I'd like you to immediately judge them. I don't mind if you do it right here, right now. Of course, you can do it?"

Alexander brutally smiled as he ordered her. He then exchanged looks with his bodyguards and made them enter battle readiness. This was to restrain Schera if she said no.

"Understood. My weapon is under custody, so is it okay if I asked it to be returned?"

Schera with not second of hesitation consented and stood up. When Alexander ordered the weapon to be returned, two bodyguards appeared, carrying her large scythe, and out of breath, they handed it to Schera.
After flourishing her scythe like a dance, Schera place its edge on Darus's neck. Its crooked, naked blade caught the light from the braziers, and it let off a dull shine.

After mercilessly smiling, she pronounced the death verdict.

“Captain Darus. Nothing against you. But you don’t have to worry. I’ll make it quick and painless. I’ve gotten quite used to it.”

Darus raised a deathly scream, begging her to stop.
Alexander, judging that Schera was serious, reconsidered this performance. This man, Darus, was the son of the enemy commander, and he still had usable value. He could be used as a bargaining chip. Even if they would execute him, it would be more effective to do it in a way to show the enemy. Killing him here would definitely be a waste. Alexander quickly came to a conclusion.

“Wait, Lieutenant Colonel Schera. We’ll put off this man’s execution for the time being. I’ve forgotten that there are still things I want to ask him. Execute the other prisoners; I don’t mind. Don’t worry about the cleanup. Do what you want with them.”

Alexander made a motion of cutting his own neck and pushed for their execution. He didn’t dislike seeing blood.

“Understood.”

“S, stop.”
“I won’t run away again, so forgive me!”
“S, spare me!”

The prisoners prostrated themselves and begged for their lives. Schera slowly shook her head, side to side.

“Sorry. But, humans have to accept their fates.”

After walking away from Darus, she relentlessly harvested five heads with flowing motions. The lives of the prisoners were cut without time to scream. The direction of the tent’s entrance was dyed with red blood spray. Darus was lost for words as he silently watched.
Had Alexander not stopped her, Darus’s head would’ve certainly been separated from his body.
Seeing her responses and actions so far, Alexander more or less had a grasp of Schera’s nature. This girl was what he called the mercenary type of human. They were humans who were agreeable if one properly valued their workings, or if one gave them what they seeked. There was no room for ideology or honor. As long as their toll was paid, they would never turn traitor. When it wasn’t, they could easily abandon their homeland and kill their brethren.
From Alexander’s point of view, they were good people, extremely easy to deal with and easy to use. And seeing her handling of the scythe, it appeared she also came with decent strength. Enough to even make his bodyguards pale it seemed.
And what captured his interest above all was her form and expression when killing. Alexander was just slightly fascinated with Death. She wasn’t a beauty by any means, but, she left a stronger impression on him than any of the women at the Imperial Palace.

“Gustav. I believe she has shown her loyalty to the Empire, but what do you think?”

“……Sir, she certainly has. She will become a reliable ally for us afterwards I believe.”

Gustav nodded with a grim expression. He didn't completely agree, but there were no more suspicions to be proved. She had killed the Kingdom's soldiers as commanded. If she was someone who still had attachment towards the Kingdom, she would show a little hesitation. There was certainly not a shred of it.

"Your seat now smells of fresh blood, but we give you our heartfelt welcome, Lieutenant Colonel Schera. I will give you your instructions later, so take a break today. If you need food, you can visit our supply wagons."

"Sir-, thank you very much. I swear unchanging loyalty. Then, please excuse me."

Schera saluted, and left the tent afterwards. Red fluid was dripping from the scythe in her hands.

"Quite an interesting woman. It seems she's somehow quite skillful too. Depending on her deeds, she might be very useful. There appear parts of her that don't seem human, but she'll become a good piece if we handle her."

"……Your Highness. That woman is dangerous. Please don't get too deeply involved with her. I cannot figure out what she is thinking."

"Uncertain as always, huh, Gustav. As long as we give her money, status, and a place to work, it'll be fine. She's that kind of person. I don't think you'll be able to understand though."

"……I am just making sure. I believe we should separate Lieutenant Colonel Schera's cavalry and disperse them in their appointments."

He would split 2,000 cavalry into four groups and attach them to each of the Empire's cavalry. Even if they were planning something, the damage would be fewer with fewer numbers, and above that, they probably wouldn't be able to link up with each other. He also hadn't forgotten to order the scout unit to search around.

"Do as you please, I don't mind. However, make sure not to injure the Lieutenant Colonel's mood. Oh right, hand her a reward for giving us valuable information and bringing heads of the Kingdom's soldiers. I don't want her to believe that our generosity is mediocre."

Ordered Alexander, and one staff officer nodded.

"By your will. I will immediately have it arranged."

"Good, then let us concentrate on the operation again. From hereon is possibly the turning point of the expedition."

At Alexander's urging, the generals once again contributed their opinions while staring at the map Schera brought. Things were different than before–their morale had risen considerably.

(……I don't doubt His Highness's eyes, but that woman definitely cannot be trusted.)

Gustav decided to keep her under further surveillance. This would be unprecedented so far, but just as he thought, he couldn't shake this nasty feeling. He attached

Second Lieutenant Karl to Schera and ordered him to report if there were any suspicious movements.
The man Karl wasn't known for his cleverness, but he would reliably carry out his orders. This kind of duty was the most suitable for him.

Imperial Army Campgrounds.
The soldiers were resting their bodies, and everyone was amusing themselves with chatter and food. The cold was harsh, and open air fires were placed all throughout the campgrounds for warmth.
Scarce provisions and unsparing coldness–these two sapped the morale of the Imperial soldiers. They hadn't yet reached a point of breakdown, but the situation was serious.
Schera headed with quick steps to the tent where her own cavalry was. If she didn't hurry, she wouldn't get any food. Before long, she saw Katarina, who was beside a campfire studying their surroundings. It seemed Katarina also noticed her, and she walked up to Schera.

"Everything go well? Lieutenant Colonel."

"Yeah. No problems. More importantly, what are you eating?"

She turned her eyes towards the soldiers stuffing themselves. It was some kind of potato, and they were smearing something on it and eating it. The light from the campfire shone on it, and it looked really delicious. Schera swallowed her saliva.

"……Distributed rations. Tonight is bread and potato."

Katarina knitted her brow and responded. Why she wasn't making a happy expression was simple. These potatoes weren't delicious.

"I wonder if there's some for me. I almost can't bear it anymore."

"I will go get some right away. Please wait for a moment."

Just when Katarina was about to go to the supply wagon, a young man called out to them–while holding bread and potato in both of his hands.

"That will not be necessary. I have brought the Lieutenant Colonel's share. Please help yourself sir."

While smiling civilly, he handed them over to Schera. With a dubious expression, Katarina asked him,

"You are?"

"Please excuse my late introduction. My name is Karl. My rank is Second Lieutenant. I have received orders from His Excellency Gustav to function in your unit. If there is anything you may need, whatever it may be, please bring it up with me. I strive to be

your strength.”

He turned towards Schera and saluted.

“Oh. Well then, I look forward to our relationship from here out. I will be eating for now, so please let me hear the story later.”

She quickly bit into the bread, and stuck the potato on a stick and began toasting it over the fire. A savory aroma tickled Schera’s nose. It gradually began to char, and the heat permeated inside.

“It is best to smear on cheese or butter when eating it. Allow me to give an introduction. The specialty of our Wealth, this Wealth potato has much nutrition and can be harvested in large quantities, though the taste is to be desired more or less. There is nothing perfect in this world.”

The Wealth potato was strong against disease and bugs, it had high nutritional value, and it could offer large yields. As long as it was not during the winter, it could be cultivated at any location. They had brought large quantities of it as provisions for this expedition. The provisions being transported here were also for the most part these potatoes. It was easy to preserve and extraordinarily cheap.
However, it wasn’t very popular with the soldiers. It had poor consistency, and above that, it was bitter. Not only that, they had this potato every day. This was also one the reasons for dropping morale. Their higher-ups, having no concern to the soldiers’ misgivings, planned to plant more in occupied territory. In the near future, they would probably be able to see a disgusting amount of potato fields.

“As long as it’s edible, I won’t complain. It really isn’t delicious though.”

“Indeed so. Those are words I wish the other soldiers could hear.”

“Complaining is proof of luxury. Driven to a corner, they wouldn’t say such things.”

“What a wise saying. I, Karl, show my admiration. ……Well then, I will end the day here, please excuse me. I beg your pardon, but there are preparations needed to be done. I would like to work with you starting tomorrow.”

He saluted and left Schera.
Karl had been smiling, but his eyes couldn’t conceal his suspicion. It was clear from a glance that he was there to observe them. ‘I have my eyes on you so don’t try anything strange,’ is what his vigilance meant, thought Katarina. They would need to take countermeasures against Karl later on.
Disinterestedly watching him go, Schera palmed the well-baked potato. While enduring the heat, she broke it in half, and steam wafted up. Katarina lathered butter on the potato for her, like a mother would for a child.
Schera opened her mouth wide and devoured even the potato skin. It had texture, and the taste of butter mixed with the bitter taste, creating an indescribable taste. The guys who said this was unappetizing were spoiled beyond belief. This would be classified as tasty enough.
Everyone of Schera’s unit was watching the sight pleasantly. They wouldn’t ever get tired of watching their superior officer enjoying herself eating.

“How is it? I think the bitter taste is too strong but.”

"It's good enough. Also, it's better than grass. There's nothing more bitter than that. I don't think I could take grass even if I spread butter on it."

"……When you talk about eating grass, I start to wonder if you are a Lieutenant Colonel or a horse."

"Humans… will eat anything when they're hungry. Be it grass or rotten meat. No one can win against starvation. Still, the only things I won't eat are humans. Never. Katarina, do you know why I wonder?"

"……I am not quite sure."

After thinking for a short while, Katarina answered honestly. She hadn't thought about eating human meat. She didn't feel guilt when manipulating corpses, but just thinking about eating human flesh gave her reservations. Even if she was starving, she probably wouldn't speak of it.

"That's because, I am human. It's that simple."

Responded Schera while chewing, with eyes that seemed to be broken somewhere. Katarina nodded, and then changed the topic afterwards. She swallowed the question she almost reflexively asked.
"Are you… really human?", would be disrespectful without bounds.

"……What was your impression of the Empire's generals?"

"They're altogether smarter than the Kingdom's. His Highness Alexander is also quite an interesting human. He'll become a fine Emperor in the future I wonder. Though that has nothing to do with me."

While carefully licking the butter on her hands, Schera replied indifferently.
The bread and potato didn't make her full at all. Anything was fine as long as it wasn't grass, but she still wanted to be full.

"……I, no, we, will accompany you to the very end, Lieutenant Colonel. As you will, please walk your own path."

Murmured Katarina, lowering her voice. Her words were filled with deep, implied meaning. If Schera wished it, they were fine with joining the Imperial Army, was what Katarina was saying. Each and every one of the cavalrymen also had the same resolution. Their vows of loyalty were not to the Kingdom, but to Schera.

"Thank you. I'm truly happy. Well then, I'll tell only you something nice."

Schera drew closer to Katarina while smiling sweetly. Then, she whispered in her ear.

"There are three reasons why I fight. First is to eat. Second is to kill the rebel army as much as I want. The final one… is a secret. I can satisfy all of them fighting for the Kingdom."

She fought to satiate her appetite. She swung her scythe to clear up her grudge and to obtain food and money. There was no other place to work as wonderful as here. Moreover, she had made comrades who would eat together with her. With this status quo, Schera was contented.

One day, her three wishes would probably be granted. It wouldn't be that far in the future.

Katarina was extremely curious about the final one, but she didn't ask about it. Even if she asked, it seemed she wouldn't get an answer. The day would come that she would understand eventually, so she was patient.

"……Then, what about the Empire?"

"Fufu-, you probably know without me saying, Katarina. I wonder who's supporting the rebel army from the shadows? For me, there's not much difference. Yes, that's how it is."
She distanced herself from Katarina and ravenously smiled. The cavalrymen who scrutinized her appearance accurately surmised their commander's intention.
Silence enveloped the surroundings for a while, with only the sounds of the bonfire crackling resonating. Schera was toasting the rest of her bread and enjoying a long meal.

Suddenly, something cold fell on Schera's cheek. Soldiers of other units also looked up towards the night sky and sighed deeply.

"So it's finally falling."
"Ahh, it's so cold. Don't do this to me!"
"Bring more booze! And also a blanket!"
"Get it yourself idiot!"
"-Dammit. I didn't come to pass the winter in a place like this!"

Disregarding the noisy surroundings, Schera was enjoying the rare feeling of snow. The cavalrymen wrapped themselves in pieces of cloth to protect their bodies from the cold. Katarina also took out her mantle, and she covered Schera.

"—-Snow, huh?"

"It seems the march will be quite severe."

"But, it'll surely be fun. It's white and pretty. It'll really make red look attractive."

A white, spread out landscape, with red droplets scattered here and there–while imagining that, Schera tossed the last bit of bread into her mouth.

Chapter 23: The Feast After a Festival is Delicious

In the weather cold like it would tear one's skin off marched Alexander leading the Imperial Army, aiming for the Second Fort along the northern coastline.
Faint white snow began piling up on the road, and the soldiers marched, huddling together to avoid their body being snatched away.
En route, a raid party of cavalry of the Kingdom's Army appeared, and postured to attack their supply wagons. It came to Alexander's mind to test out Schera here. He sent out a messenger, summoned Schera's unit, and gave his instructions.

"Lieutenant Colonel. I want to see how you fulfill your duties with my eyes. Will you lightly kick around those guys for me? If you hit them once, they should immediately run away. A deep pursuit is unnecessary.

"—-Sir-, understood."

"This is your first battle for the Empire. I wish you good luck."

Alexander mischievously smiled, and Schera trivially nodded.

"One hundred riders follow me-! We'll give the enemy cavalry a beating-!"

"OU-!"

"—-Schera's Cavalry, charge-!"

"FOLLOW THE LT. COL.-! DON'T FALL BEHIND!"

Aiming for the enemy cavalry, she kicked her horse and began briskly galloping. After her followed 100 of Schera's Cavalry with black flags raised. All the members of her cavalry were wearing armor of the Empire, but the flag of their unit hadn't changed.

"Commanding Officer, what shall we do?"

"It seems the enemy is of the same number. They're expecting us to run away immediately. Hmph, if that's the case, how about we try them out for size? There's no one who can match us Madrosians in handling horses."

"Sir-! We will show them our pride."

The cavalry of the Kingdom's Army temporarily postured to escape, but seeing the small numbers of Schera's unit, they decided to exchange blows. They raised their spears, reorganized the ranks, and resolutely began the charge. Their main duty was to hinder the supply line via a raid on the supply wagons, but the actual call for offense and defense was entrusted to the commander at the location itself.
After all, it was out of the question for a superior officer to give directions to all the commando units separately. Kerry had stationed these kinds of independent

commando units in various places.

Cavalry of the Kingdom and Empire crossed. Schera's scythe drew first blood, sending the heads of the first two riders flying. Both cavalries crashed, and several people fell off their horses. While grappling with each other, many hand-to-hand battles unfolded. Spears were thrusted from atop horseback, but aiming for that opening, other riders skewered their bodies.

"Black flag with a white crow coat of arms, aren't you Death God Schera!? Why are you with the Imperial Army!? Have you betrayed the Kingdom!?"

Indignantly shouted the Commanding Officer of the Kingdom's Army while swinging his spear. Schera replied in an disinterested tone of voice.

"I wonder why? How truly strange."

"You shameless-! Become rust on my spear!"

After spinning his spear above his head several times, he forcefully swung it down, aiming for Schera. She slightly flicked away the blow with his body weight behind it, and then sweeped his body with the handle, knocking him off his horse. Having his body potently struck, the commander swooned. With no hesitation, she penetrated his skull over the helmet. After she twisted her scythe once, she pulled out, and fresh blood scattered over the area.

"C, Commanding Officer was done in! R, retreat-! Retreat-!"
"We cannot be annihilated! We will pay back this debt-!"

Having their commanding officer killed in battle, the raiding cavalry immediately decided to withdraw. As Schera had been ordered that pursuit was unnecessary, she returned to beside Alexander. Because both cavalries had only exchanged one bout, casualties were few. This would probably be considered Schera's victory since looking at the results, the enemy had been repelled and their commander killed.
Alexander had watched the spectacle with an eyepiece for validation, and he nodded in satisfaction. Then, when he was informed that Schera had returned, he openly praised her.

"The Madros family's boasted cavalry were like babies! Your prowess, was honestly splendid."

"I am honored, by your praise."

"From what I've heard, you've been given the alias Death God because you use that scythe. At first, I suspected it was some fool, but now I've seen it in practice with these eyes, I can agree."

"For me, this is the easiest to handle. It fits my hands very well."

Schera lightly shook her large scythe, and dark red clots of blood dripped down. In that instant, the bodies of the officers and men around her stiffened involuntarily. For some reason, they perceived an illusion like that blade was being swung towards them. It wasn't the cold air; a different chill ran throughout their bodies.
Alexander's countenance changed for just a second, but he immediately pulled himself together.

“Lieutenant Colonel, I have great expectations for your activity in this expedition. Depending on your achievements, I plan to place you under my direct supervision. I have great need of those with talents.”

When Alexander said direct supervision, he meant officially ushering her into the First Corps. Currently, Schera was only temporarily affiliated. If Alexander felt like it, there was also the possibility of further promotion. The field officers around them showed expressions of jealousy. Alexander was the future Emperor, and even just having one’s name remembered would prove useful hereafter. They couldn’t accept this turncoat newcomer capturing his interest.

“Your Highness.”

Warned Gustav, but Alexander was not paying attention. He had confidence that someone of his caliber could handle her.

“I am a human who properly values talent. I won’t let my personal feelings interfere. Consequently, I highly value your gifts. Lieutenant Colonel Schera, I want you to freely wield your power for the Empire.”

“Sir-, I, Schera, will serve with whole-hearted devotion.”

Schera said appropriate words and deeply lowered her head.
She didn’t particularly have anything against the killed cavalry of the Kingdom. So that Yalder also wouldn’t appear suspicious, she had been authorized to not hold back and fight with her full power.
Incidentally, the heads that had been brought during that time when she surrendered to the Imperial Army were of soldiers that had been killed in battle. There had been people opposed to it, saying it was blasphemy against the deceased, but Kerry had faced them down. Those living were more essential, he declared. Then, he offered up his own son, Darus, as a sacrifice.
Darus knew nothing about this matter. He probably thought Schera had truly turned traitor. Also, during his execution earlier, if she hadn’t been stopped, she would’ve certainly killed Darus. She had been strongly ordered by Kerry to kill him without hesitation when the time came.

“Your Highness, do you really intend on appointing Lieutenant Colonel Schera to an important post?”

“What, Gustav, are you dissatisfied? I’m extremely interested in that thing. Isn’t that thing a truly fine weapon of destruction? We should utilize it until it breaks. That physical strength despite having the body of a woman; what a fair sight for the eyes.”

“……”

“Of course, I don’t intent on taking her as a concubine. There are places that I’d like more meat on if possible. Though Sir Death’s face isn’t too bad.”

Alexander laughed in a good humor, and Gustav knitted his brows.

“Your Highness, please refrain from such rash remarks. This is the most critical time.”

"I know. Just a joke. I don't have the freedom to choose my partner anyway."

Alexander reverted to his serious expression, and sent the signal to begin the march. If Yalder opened the gates when they arrived at the Second Fort, then Alexander's First Corps would head to capture Madros, and Gustav's Seventh Corps would conduct a raid on the food storehouse. In other words, Gustav would only be beside Alexander for a little longer. His misgivings about Schera still not dispelled, Gustav prompted vigilance, but Alexander again had no ears for him.
Gustav had known Alexander for a lengthy amount of time, and he had admonished him many times up until now. Alexander was someone who had the capacity to take that harsh criticism, but on the other hand, he had too much conceit about his own high caliber.
That being said, Gustav couldn't state definitely that Schera's actions were suspicious. She had executed the prisoners without hesitation, and was going to kill the hostage Darus. Even in their fight with compatriate cavalry just now, there was no hint of her going easy on them, and she had killed the commander. She certainly was fighting as a member of the Imperial Army.
Nevertheless, why Gustav couldn't trust Schera was because of a vagueness, intuition from his long years of service. Vague it may be, but it was strongly warning him, telling him to be careful around that woman, telling him that if he was negligent, she would kill them in their sleep. That thing wasn't something that could be tamed.

"……This may incur His Highness's displeasure, and nothing against the bodyguards, but it would probably be best to attach more guards. His Highness is still too young. He has too much faith in his own judgement. There is no shortage of people in this world that cannot be understood."

Gustav called together the staff officers for a confidential meeting, and directed them to increase the guards around Alexander. The staff officers also weren't listening at first, but when Gustav strongly declared he would take full responsibility, they hesitatingly agreed to the conditions.

—-Three days later.
Alexander's Imperial Army with not a bit of resistance entered the Second Fort. The defense commander Yalder had opened that gates as promised. Alexander called Yalder to headquarters to immediately meet him. But, instead came a staff officer, a man who named himself Sidamo.

"We have received your order to convene at this occasion, but our commander Yalder says that he cannot show his unsightly appearance to His Highness. Just this one time, he begs for your pardon."

"What's there to be ashamed of after all you've done? Don't worry and call him. If this expedition ends in success, Yalder's merit will be greater than anyone's. ……This is an order. Tell him to unreservedly show himself to me."

Alexander declared, and Sidamo lowered his head deeply and departed.
Several minutes later, Yalder supported by Sidamo appeared before Alexander. In his right hand was a cane, and he appeared to be unable to decently walk by himself. His face swelled hideously, horribly enough that he couldn't open his eyes. His brow was

wrapped in bandages, and he bore wounds serious enough that walking every step was difficult.

"Sir Yalder. What's with that appearance!?"

Alexander stood up from his seat and asked about the situation. Yalder's voice shook as he replied.

"As a military man, this is my end. Please, laugh at me. This is the fate of the man once known as the Commander of Steel."

"And, that poor treatment?"

"I was dismissed, and in the end, demoted to Lieutenant General. Further, I was sentenced for violating military regulations and immediately punished by cane. To think that this is their treatment of a man who has devoted himself to the Kingdom for many years, it is truly, truly vexing."

Yalder cut his words off there. He was lost for words, and a groan leaked out of his lips. The conversation continued again at Sidamo's urging.

"We were ordered to be a sacrificial piece here. This is the only role left for a defeated Army Corps, they said. The executives of the Kingdom plan to put preparations in order during that time and launch a counter-offensive. ……Not just us, to force even those under our wing to die a dog's death is intolerable, and so we made the decision to surrender to the Empire."

"……I see now. My sympathy to your suffering."

Alexander said with a compassionate expression, and Yalder kneeled, begging,

"Your Highness. Please add us to the vanguard unit. I want to show those fellows who slighted us the spirit of a soldier. I beg you. I beg you."

"……No, not with that body of yours. It's probably tough to use a spear. You should devote yourself to healing right now. Stimulation will reopen your wounds. Sir Sidamo, take Sir Yalder to his room."

"……Until they actually opened the gates, I had my suspicions, but it seems Yalder's surrender is genuine. What do you all think?"

Alexander asked Gustav, and even the strongly suspicious Gustav nodded in agreement.

"Yalder is famous for being a man with high pride. He is hot-blooded, and he is not a man who can come up with strategy. Anyone would feel disgusted risking his life and being rewarded like that."

"Either way, we were able to occupy the Second Fort. This is favorable for the operation I'd say."

Said Alexander, and the staff officers nodded. Then, they turned to deciding who to entrust the defense of this fort to.

“Until those trailing behind us arrive, let’s put Yalder on defense. His division is a little less than 7,000. Just the right size I’d say.”

“However, thinking about the worst case scenario, how about entrusting command of defense to someone else?”

Gustav offered a prudent policy to his superior, but Alexander laughed it off.

“While he has those kinds of injuries, he can’t do something like decently command soldiers. If we bring defeated troops, I don’t believe they’ll be useful. They will only increase the food consumed. In that case, I believe it would be the best course of action to have them watch this place.”

Said Alexander, and the staff officers showed agreement.

“I agree with you I believe, Your Highness. If we leave some people to observe them, we won’t have to worry. Above all else, those guys don’t have a shred of loyalty left towards the Kingdom.”

“Not only that, speed from here out is more important than anything. We must immediately begin the march, capture the storehouse before the enemy prepares their defenses, and surround Madros.”

One staff officer laid out a plan while indicating on the map. Alexander encouragingly nodded, and gave his orders.

“30,000 of the First Corps will begin to march to Madros. Gustav, 20,000 of your Seventh Corps will continue to head east and destroy the storehouse. Afterwards, supplement the Madros encirclement. I intend to have it fall before then though.”

“By your will. Your Highness, please take earnest caution.”

“Looks like your worried disposition isn’t any better, Gustav. I’m no longer a child. Your excessive concern is unnecessary.”

“I beg your pardon for that. I, Gustav, have misjudged His Highness.”

Jested Gustav, and Alexander made a wry smile. Gustav inwardly gave priority to Wealth territory over the Empire, and Alexander only thought and labored to acquire the throne. These two people were on different sides, and they kept up a strange, mutual give-and-take relationship.

“……This fight will be a bridge to our glory. Gentlemen, I expect much more labor from you all.”

Alexander expressed his determination, looking over the generals arranged around him, and all of them hardened their wills and nodded.

—-50,000 of the Imperial Army began marching from the Second Fort. Their targets: The food storehouse and also Madros Castle. The 7,000 of Yalder’s surrendered Legion were on defense of the Second Fort.

Assigned as a commando unit of the First Corps, Schera's unit of 500 were the 'tail' part of the Imperial Army's column formation. They had orders from their superior officer to defend against raiding cavalry of the Kingdom's Army on their supply wagons. The rest of Schera's unit, 1,500, were scatteredly arranged, and they were given the same duty of defending the convoys.
In simpler terms, Schera had gotten the short end of the stick. Of course she would defend it to the end, but if by chance the convoys took damage, her head would likely be sent flying.
Alexander stressed marching speed generally: the front of his army were light cavalry, the middle was the main body of the army, and to the rear were the convoys and siege weapons. They continued the forced march even during the night, relying on light from torches, and approached Madros castle with astounding speed.
A road which should have taken a week normally was travelled momentously in merely three days.
They hadn't been discovered by the enemy, and 30,000 of the First Corps had been able to continue to promisingly march.
Then, when they were a day away from enemy headquarters, Alexander had the entire army take a rest.

"Rest a lot tonight. Tomorrow we will finally attack Madros. Everyone maintain your spirits."

Concealing themselves in the convenient woodlands, the Imperial soldiers relaxed their weary bodies while stifling their breathing. Fires to warm themselves were prohibited. There would be no point in coming so far if the enemy discovered them. For provisions, pre-prepared cold meat and bread… and potato were distributed. Even so, the soldiers put up with their discomfort. If they won this battle, they were promised enormous reward. Also, they were almost there. If the city fell, they would probably get the chance to plunder. On that occasion, they planned on letting out all of their boiling desires.

Confirming that the vicinity had fallen silent, Schera came out from her shabby tent. Soldiers of her cavalry under compulsion to camp, wrapped in scraps of cloth, slowly raised their heads. Their eyes were keen with no sense of fatigue.
Katarina sent the signal with her gaze, and Schera laughed, showing her white teeth. The cavalry members also were about to smile when,

—-Karl, tasked with observing Schera and group, appeared accompanied by one infantryman.

"Just what to you intent to do so late at night, Lieutenant Colonel Schera. Leading your cavalry members, maybe you are heading out somewhere?"

"It's too cold, so I thought I'd go move my body. Karl, how about you come too I wonder?"

Carrying her scythe, Schera replied undisturbed. The cavalrymen were silent, watching.

"No, I am fine. Apart from that, I have been put on strict surveillance. I have been given instructions to cut down anyone unnecessarily noisy and anyone moving without authority. Lieutenant Colonel, please go back. Otherwise—-"

Karl raised his hand, and the infantryman unsheathed his sword with slow movements.

"Otherwise, what, I wonder. Hey, Katarina. I'm curious."

"Indeed, Lieutenant Colonel. Just what does Second Lieutenant Karl plan to do? Perhaps he is threatening us."

Katarina responded to Schera's question with scorn. Behind her clouded glasses were concealed eyes brimming with madness.
To make them understand that it wasn't just a threat, Karl ordered for Katarina, who had taken a defiant attitude, to be punished.
Of course, they couldn't cause an uproar, so they couldn't do anything showy. He was going to gag her and then cane her. Thought it was 'cane,' the strikes would be with a sheathe, and it was quite capable of causing death if done improperly.

"I have received special orders from Lieutenant General Gustav. If Lieutenant Colonel Schera has suspicious activities, punish her. Second Lieutenant Katarina, I will drive into your body for you, that I am being serious. I do not discriminate against the female gender. I treat everyone equally, so be at ease."

When Karl waved his hand down, the accompanying infantryman grabbed the arms, forced the person to kneel, and put the gag in to prevent any sound.

"——!?"

Seeing the person writhing, wondering what was going on, Schera made a grand smile.

"Karl, because I am indebted to you for giving me food, I will kill you painlessly. You are a… really lucky man. Really, I intended on your screams substituting for the signal."

Katarina snapped her fingers, and the accompanying infantryman corpse placed his sword on the nape of Karl's neck. This had been Katarina's measure to keep watch over Karl.

"With that, shall we do it, Lieutenant Colonel?"

"No, I've thought of something good. I've… never seen fireworks before. In the clear winter sky, they appear very pretty, I've heard. So, let's make Karl a firework in the night sky."

"Great thinking. It will also be a signal easy for our other comrades to understand."

"Second Lieutenant Karl, this is farewell. Good-bye. The Wealth potato, was truly delectable."

After Schera gently stroked his face, she impaled his skull with her scythe, and gave him an instant death. He had probably died without feeling any pain.
She pulled out, and grabbed him by the collar with both hands. She took a stance, and checked for confirmation with Katarina, and then the cavalrymen.

Everyone silently nodded and took up their weapons, their eyes fierily gleaming, saturated with bloodlust.

"Well then, shall we begin? It's cold, so let's do this magnificently."

Ready. Set. Schera hurled Karl's corpse up into the sky as hard as she could. A dark object climbed high in the air while spraying blood into the fluttering powder snow of the sky. Once it reached its apex, Katarina snapped her fingers, and the dark object was engulfed in dark red flames, and then exploded with a boom.
Schera merrily watched, and then licked the snow dotted with red that had accumulated on her hands.

—-The fun festival had begun.

After the roar of the explosion, flames rose forth throughout the area, and shouts, screams, and shrieks covered the Empire's campgrounds. Schera's Cavalry, wearing armor of the Imperial Army on their bodies, shouted false information while slaughtering and setting fire. The exhausted Imperial soldiers were crushed without time to decipher anything.

"Major General Gale's division has betrayed! Take up your swords and fight back!"
"Surprise attack from the Kingdom's Army! We're being ambushed-!"
"The supply convoys have been destroyed! All the provisions have been burned-!"
"It'll be a massacre at this rate-! Kill them back-!"

Reports contradicted each other, and the soldiers swung their swords and spears without knowing who the enemy was. In the darkness, terror and madness infected them.

"You idiots-! Can't you shut up!? The one's randomly making noise are the betr—-"

Rebuked a composed officer, and a lance went through his throat from behind. The soldier pulled out his lance that had a black flag attached to it, and silently went to set fire to another place.

Commanders who had jumped to their feet tried to calm down the chaos. But, Schera's cavalrymen that had been dispersed all over tried to kill those generals with maximum priority. Then, they would shout that the commanding officer had been killed and further expand the scope of casualties. Like termites devouring a tree, the casualties were spreading at frightening speed.
There began to be vast amounts of victims killed by friendly fire in the First Corps of the Imperial Army that had fallen into havoc. A staff officer that had received a report from a messenger entered Alexander's tent.

"Your Highness, Alexander, Your Highness-! Bad news! Enemy operatives have slipped into our army and are conducting arsony!"

Forcibly woken from his shallow sleep, Alexander unhappily scowled at the panicked staff officer, and give him instructions with an indifferent tone.

"Then immediately capture the operatives. What's there to be confused about? Calmly deal with it."

"We are no longer in such a situation! Our army has fallen into chaos, and soldiers are beginning to kill their comrades! Your Highness has to take command as soon as possible and personally control this situation!"

Getting the feeling that the state of affairs were more serious than imagined, Alexander commanded his retainers and had them hurriedly put armor on his body. He gave out instructions to the head of his bodyguards, and the soldiers tightly arranged themselves around Alexander.
Exiting the tent, Alexander was spontaneously lost for words. Flames rose from nearly the entire woodlands which were the Empire's campgrounds. Fire spread to the surrounding trees, dying the night sky with fluttering snow red.

"W, what is this. We're only a bit further from Madros-! What are Gale, Rap, Dors, and the others doing!? Send out messengers to get them to immediately assemble-!"

Alexander was enraged, and he angrily shouted the names of the division commanders of the First Corps. They were generals who Alexander had saw potential in and gave them their ranks. They were people who might even be called his proteges.

"T, that is, Major General Gale has turned traitor the soldiers say."

One messenger pronounced, and Alexander rejected it.

"Foolish-! Isn't that obviously the enemy's misinformation!? Like there'd be anyone who'd turn traitor in this situation! Victory is right before our eyes!"

Alexander seized the messenger by the lapels. Something rolled at his feet; it rolled unevenly, and losing momentum before long, it came to a perfect stop at a place slightly away from Alexander.
It was a human head. It had a dreadful look on it, and he remembered seeing it somewhere. It was an exceptional, veteran commander that Alexander had taken up. It was that of Gale, who led one of the divisions.

"G, Gale? Gale!? Why are you—-"

"He had been a very excellent commander. Your Highness has a discerning eye it seems. That person… tried to preserve command of the soldiers until the very end."

From the dark, resonated a voice that he was familiar with. Then, the atmosphere suddenly tensed. There was something abominable lurking. It was something sinister that made one feel dread. Something that couldn't be expressed with words.
Snap, and something exploded nearby. Flames flared up, illuminating that thing.

"……Lt. Col, S-schera?"

Alexander and his surrounding guards doubted their eyes. A little girl covered in blood

from head to toe was trudging closer. In that thing's hands were held two more heads.

"I'll give these to you too. There were so many outstanding men in the Imperial Army. They were also quite loyal, and they worried about His Highness until their end. Your Highness is truly a fortunate man."

Schera threw the heads. Those were of Rap and Dors. Their eyes were wide open, and had an expression stuck on them that made one think they had a heroic end.
That moment, the bodyguards that had fallen into distress unsheathed their swords and pointed them at Schera from every direction.

"D, die, you monster!!"

"Schera!! You traitor!"

"It's the deceived's fault for being deceived. Staff Officer Sidamo told me."

After cleaving the foremost person vertically in half, the scythe turned, drawing an arc, and cut up the two to the left and right in turn. She dodged the spear coming at her from behind, and mid-turn the tip of that tempered blade split his face from the side.
The bodyguards used their bodies as shields, obstructing Schera's path and not letting her approach Alexander. Some risked their lives to launch an attack, but their swords did not reach, and with one blow they were turned into pieces of meat. Even so, they continued to attack; everyone understood that it was their mission as bodyguards. No matter the situation, they had to protect the life of Alexander to the last man–they were bodyguards.
In the span of not even a minute, tragic corpses were strewn about the area. Small sickles crookedly protruded from the brows of soldiers who tried to snipe her from the shadows. They had tried to stab her with spears all at the same time, but not one attack reached her. Every time, a strong counter from Schera had reaped their lives.

Behind her, Schera's Cavalry were drawing closer. White ominous crows rushed through the blazing trees. They hastened to join their Lord.

"So, Your Highness, it is dangerous here. Luckily under Sir Gustav's instructions the guards here have been augmented. Leave stopping the monster in its tracks to them. Let us temporarily retreat and rally this situation. Once the night brightens, the chaos will settle down naturally."

A staff officer proposed, carrying out his own duty despite his face pale from the tragedy before his eyes.

"Are you telling me to run away? You're saying that the First Prince Alexander is frightened of merely a few hundred traitors and must withdraw-!? I command a force of 30,000!! Why must I retreat!?"

"Your Highness, in the worst case scenario, our first First Corps will be routed. Consequently, it is the commander's obligation to survive until the end. If you understand, then hurry and go!"

Shouted the aged Staff Officer, and Alexander was temporarily speechless. The Staff Officer ordered two bodyguards standing by to take Alexander to a safe place and

take refuge. Protect him no matter the cost, he ordered.

"Take His Highness to a place where his allies are gathered. The whole army could not have fallen into chaos. There are likely to be units waiting for instructions. Evacuate until there and then take command of the whole army. You two must protect His Highness no matter what-."

"……"

"Are you listening-!? You guys are the glorious Bodyguards-! What're you frightened of!? Why aren't you answering-!"

Thundered the Staff Officer, and the bodyguards plainly responded.

"……Understood."

"…….Leave it to uS."

The two large bodyguards firmly grabbed both of Alexander's arms and pulled him away. After seeing them off, the Staff Officer unsheathed his sword and joined the bodyguards stopping the monster.
Reinforcements had joined Death swinging its cursed scythe. They had set fire to the area as ordered, and they returned to beside their commander right after. There were 500 for the time being. The remaining soldiers were running full speed to come home next to Schera while fanning the chaos.

"Seems His Excellency Gustav's intuition was correct. Still, to have caused this many casualties. For our magnificent Imperial Army to have become like this due to just one lousy bug."

Muttered the old Staff Officer. He reflected.

Schera's betrayal was clear. Which meant that Yalder's surrender was also a fake. In that case, their entire invasion plan this time was read by their enemy. The Imperial Army had thoroughly fallen into their trick and revealed this sorry state. As a staff officer, this was a disgrace that he couldn't apologize for even if he gave his own life.

"If it were me, I would wipe out the Second Fort, take advantage of this turmoil and launch a surprise attack. Then, I would launch a pincer attack coordinated with Madros Castle. ……However, for us to have been so profoundly disorganized… could only have been done by the monster before our eyes. Is that thing human? Isn't it actually Death?"

The 7,000 of Yalder's Legion were racing towards the Imperial Army that had frighteningly quickly marched here. Likely at dawn, or maybe even before then, they would sink their fangs into the First Corps. Having adequately rested, it was obvious that Yalder's Legion would be faster than the Imperial Army.

"Any any rate, kukuh-, what is this. The stalwart imperial guards are being slaughtered by just a single little girl aren't they? No, hold on. This is surely a dream. Yeah, definitely. There's no way something like this would happen otherwise. Hundreds of elites being killed by just one person, there's no way that could happen. This is a dream. This is a dream. This is a dream. This is a dream."

The bodyguards were easily suppressed, and Death that had eaten all of them, leaving not one remaining, approached the Staff Officer continuing to mumble with a blank look. With an expression full of pity, it brushed his cheek and gently whispered.

"—-sweet dreams. good night."

Alexander had been brought to a small, deserted hill by the two bodyguards. There were no signs of any allies. Thinking this strange, Alexander questioned them, but the soldiers said not a word. Even when he struggled against the hold on both his arms, he couldn't escape from the inhuman strength binding them.

(These guys, aren't breathing at all. They aren't even sweating. Their bodies are too cold. It's almost like……"

Putting his disordered breathing in order, Alexander studied the soldiers' faces. There was no light in their eyes. Their faces were too pale.

"H, hey. You guys……."

When Alexander asked for the umpteenth time, there was the sound of fingers snapping, and both his arms were freed from their restraints with no prior warning. He fell forward, and someone hugged his body. When his brain registered whose face entered his field of vision, his body stiffened in overwhelming terror.

"Ah, ah, ahhh—-"

"Good evening, Your Highness Alexander. You don't have to be so scared. There's no one here besides us."

Cackling laughed the bloodsmeared Schera in ridicule. Katarina and the cavalrymen surrounded them in a ring.

"W, what are, you going to do to me."

"I'm thinking about that right now actually. Katarina, which do you think is better, killing His Highness or capturing him alive? I don't really care so."

Schera asked Katarina while wiping blood and sweat from her brow.
Katarina closed her eyes and thought for a short while. In her palm were gripped the two walnuts that had been given as a present from her superior officer. She rhythmically rolled them as they clattered, collected her thoughts, and reported to her superior.

"I believe it will be more profitable to take him back alive. We can kill him whenever after all. We can likely use him as a bargaining chip for negotiations. That would be much more convenient for the Kingdom I believe."

"So that's how it is."

"If, if I had to go along with your whims, I'd rather—-"

The instant Alexander shouted, Schera's hands tightly grasped both sides of Alexander's head, immobilizing him. Alexander's eyes were forced to look at the monster before his eyes. He was made to stare closely at her bared, white teeth and eyes filled with a deep, unfathomable darkness.

"If you want to die, then please go ahead and tell me. But, I won't kill you so easily. I won't kill you even if you beg me to kill you. Until your voice dies out, until your consciousness shrivels, you will continue to live. When your very being collapses, then, I will kill you underfoot like a bug. If you have that resolution, please say it Your Highness."

Her bloodstained hands affectionately rubbed Alexander's cheeks. The sensation of the lukewarm slime was strongly burned into Alexander's brain. After stroking his cheek several times, Schera happily smiled.

"—-Ah, ahh-, ahh."

"Lieutenant Colonel, you'll cripple him if you overdo it. That thing's value will drop if it breaks"

"Apologies. Certainly, it's not good to overdo it. His Highness did also give me food and money. If I'm going to kill him, I guess I have to do it more pleasantly. ……Also, we've been finally freed from that stuffy mission."

She let go of the reactionless Alexander and lightly stretched, going "Ahh~". Laughter came from the cavalry watching her. It was an action that didn't suit their superior officer who was called Death.

"What shall we do from here on? His Excellency Yalder's Legion will soon arrive, and it appears a pincer unit from Madros will arrive too. If we want to join the attack, we need to link up with them I believe."

Yalder's Legion and 10,000 sortied from Madros planned to launch a united attack soon on the First Corps of the Imperial Army that had lost its convoys, fallen into chaos, and couldn't take action. They had further lost their main commanders, and the First Prince of the Empire was captured. They would be routed with just one blow, no doubt about it.

"There remains one more person, who we have to greet. I've waited quite a while, so let's go see him. If we drive the cavalry, we'll probably meet him in time."

"Understood!"

"Politely carry His Highness to Madros. Please and thank you."

Schera ordered the two cavalrymen who had recently joined, the two former mercenaries. Both of them straightened their backs and respectfully bowed.

"Sir-, we will make sure to bring this man to Madros! Leave it to us!"

“Very well. ……We will march north from here, and strike the back of the Empire’s Seventh Corps! Schera’s Cavalry, begin the advance-!”

“OU-!!”

—-To raid the food storehouse, Gustav leading the Seventh Corps were heading east from the Second Fort.
At the same time as the sky brightened, a messenger conveyed an urgent report.

“Your Excellency Gustav! Bad news-!”

“What! Calm down and report.”

“The First Corps was hit by an enemy’s night attack and annihilated! Our allies are routed, and His Highness Alexander whereabouts are unknown!”

“……No mistake?”

With a grave expression, Gustav asked for confirmation from the messenger.

“Sir-, this information is for certain!”

“……What is this.”

The creases of Gustav’s brow bunched together, and he crossed his arms while groaning.

“Yalder in the Second Fort has betrayed, and he plans to pincer with a unit that has launched themselves from Madros Castle. There are reports that traitors also appeared within the army, but the details are ambiguous.”

Read aloud a staff officer, skimming the report from the messenger. He was disturbed internally, but he made an effort not to let that show on his expression.

“It’s hard to believe that His Highness’s First Corps would be decimated that easily though…”

“However, it’s hard to consider this misinformation. We ought to think that the First Army has taken to their heels.”

“I fear Lieutenant Colonel Schera may have induced havoc from the inside. No matter how elite the soldiers, an army is frail when the line of command breaks. ……So Yalder and Schera’s surrender was indeed fake. We’ve been duped.”

The staff officers could only keep silent at Gustav’s words. There were two roads the Seventh Corps could choose from.
They could continue east as they were and conduct a raid as planned from the

beginning. However, that necessitated the resolve to be annihilated.
The other was to retake the abandoned Second Fort and withdraw to Wealth. That would also be quite challenging, but there was a good possibility that the trailing units had drew close enough to the Second Fort.

"……We Wealthians, would never be beaten by Madrosians correct?"

"Sir-, there is no need to show our backs. Please give your order to immediately charge forward. If we burn the storehouse, we can also make the enemy taste hell!"

"Very well. Then, we shall advance forward. We can't show our faces to Wealth if we can't even destroy a storehouse!"

"Understood! We'll show them; we'll absolutely obliterate the storehouse!!"

Gustav decided to advance forward. If they burned the storehouse, he would be able to once again induce a stalemate. Also, assuming Alexander had been taken prisoner, he was considering the possibility of being able to carry out negotiations favorably. And thus, with a certain static interfering with his composed thinking, he chose to take a path he would've never taken normally.

When they finally arrived at a place where they could see the disguised and fenced storehouse, the Seventh Corps increased their speed of advance, whether they liked it or not. They leaped. Onto their deathbeds, hidden by high thickets.

"W, what's this-!? Th, this is—-"

"It's a bottomless swamp-! Stop, Stop you all-!!"

"All members halt, Halt-!! If you don't want to die, Halt!!"

Upon the vanguard group entering the marshlands, the soldiers met with disaster. Bodies sank into the mud, and they couldn't move. Not only that, they began to be swallowed up to their torsos, and before long, they were completely swallowed.
Not everywhere was bottomless of course, but their feet had been resoundly stopped. Horses struggled and fell, and soldiers with the weight of their armor had poor footing and couldn't stand up.

Gustav orders the entire army to stop and sent the order to slowly back up. But, it was already too late.
The entirety of Kerry's Fifth Army had been deployed here in ambush, and had held their breaths, waiting for the Imperial Army to jump to their deaths.

"You shitface Gustav, how rare of you plunge so deep in. You saved us a lot of trouble. Surround the enemy!! Push them into the marshlands and shoot them with arrows!! Massacre the Wealthians-!!

"Understood!!"
"Push them in-!!"
"Rain down the arrows!"

War drums beat, horns pealed, and the entire army began the assault. The men with

their feet seized in the marshlands were doused with arrows like rain, and they helplessly collapsed. Awaiting those who tried to escape for dear life was a volley from mounted archers, the Fifth Army's pride.

Kerry had also taken up a bow, and with steady aim, was accurately shooting down soldiers. While nocking the next arrow, he thought,

(Gustav, it seems you've inhaled Sir Death's miasma, and never doubted us for a second.)

Why would they expressly build a storehouse here, straight ahead from the Second Fort whose defense was unreliable. There was no reason, except that this entire region was completely safeguarded by marshlands. Otherwise, there would never be a storehouse build on difficult-to-defend flat land. Kerry was more familiar than anyone with the Madros terrain.
If it were the normal Gustav, he would've certainly conducted reconnaissance, cautiously marched, and seen through them probably.
What made him not was that his eyes had been clouded by the oppressive presence known as Death.

"Retreat-, Retreat! Break through the encirclement and return to Wealth even if you have to do it alone!! For I of all people to have artfully been ensnared in a trap-!"

Yelled Gustav, encouraging the soldiers. He felt ashamed of himself for losing his composure this late in the game. He had been thoroughly duped by Schera who he had doubted in the first place, and then bit at the bait dangled right before his eyes. How foolish he had been.
He marshaled his soldiers while his face was flushing with anger and remorse. There was no time to regret.

"Your Excellency, Your Excellency cannot die here. Go back and live for us Wealthians. That is the duty of a man of the Wealth family. Please take care of our families."

"I cannot! I will with you gentlemen—-"

"You mustn't-! We'll launch an attack and open a way out without fail. Strike there and break through no matter what!"

"Your Excellency Gustav, please stay safe-!"

"Wait, I'm—-!"

Shaking off Gustav's voice telling them to stop, the elite unit to his side began the assault, fervently thrashing the enemy infantry. They were impaled by pikes, dragged down from horses, and many people were killed. But, their intense onslaught was able to create an opening in the Kingdom's Army for just a second.

"Arrghh, don't let their sacrifices be in vain! Everyone follow me-! We'll break through this encirclement for sure!!"

"Follow His Excellency!! Long Live Wealth!!"

“Glory to Wealth!!”

“Kill even one more Madrosian-!”

Gustav had broken through the encirclement, and took flight with all his energy, aiming for the Second Fort. Trying to prevent him, Kerry’s pursuit unit relentlessly attacked them. There were no Wealthian prisoners. Everyone fought until they died, and thus the killing continued.
As losses began increasing beyond expectations, Kerry reluctantly ordered the pursuit to stop. There was nothing more dangerous than soldiers who were prepared to die, soldiers that had given themselves up to Death. Gustav’s soldiers had fought with that degree of determination.

Gustav’s Seventh Corps that had been 20,000 was now reduced to 5,000. The survivors scattered loosely in all directions, and through their own respective judgements, tried to retreat to Wealth.
Those accompanying Gustav around him were merely 500. There was no command, and they did nothing but continue to steadily retreat.
In the violent snowstorm, in front of them appeared an army of cavalry. Their flag was black, and it had a white crow coat of arms on it. It was the emblem of Schera, the character ought to be called the leading actor behind their defeat.

“……So here is Death’s curtain up huh? Perfect timing to give them a parting gift. We’ll make them accept their punishment!”

Gustav unsheathed his sword with a vehement look and gave the order to attack. Schera’s Cavalry similarly began the charge, and it became a battle royale with horses of both sides mutually stopped. Both sides had accumulated fatigue, and the only ones moving around robustly was Schera and a few others. Lively swinging her scythe, she reaped anyone she could get her hands on.

“Schera-!! You bastard, how dare you appear!! If you have any pride as a warrior, kill yourself immediately-!”

“Ahaha-! Lieutenant General Gustav, I’ve been waiting for you! I knew if I did that I’d splendidly run into you like this. The more heads of generals the better. Sorry, but please become my meal-!”

“Silence-! By the pride of Wealth, I will kill you-!”

Schera’s scythe swooped down at Gustav, but he parried her furious attacks, deftly manipulating his sword. His intuition from his many years warned him that he couldn’t take the blows with his sword. Gustav continued to flourish his sword, warding off her power.
His horse wildly neighed, and Gustav’s motivating shouts echoes around the vicinity.

“—-Ha-!! Haaaaaaaaa—!!!”

“—–there. Flowingly. Like this-!”

Deflecting the force, he handled Schera’s blows by a paper thin margin. In this predicament, Gustav displayed his proficiency in swordsmanship.

“Naive, little girl-!!”

"——!!"

Schera got unintentionally caught in Gustav's feint. He feigned his posture broken, and the scythe was swung downwards, but Gustav avoided it by centimeters.

"I've got you-!!"

Schera had overextended. Gustav aimed for her chest, sending forth a sharp thrust with all his might behind it. It was an extremely fast thrust, the fastest in Gustav's lifetime.

"……."

"……How regrettable. Just a fingertip away. Lieutenant General Gustav, you really aren't lucky."

"Gugah, Gah——"

Gustav's thrusted sword has stopped only a small distance away from Schera's heart. He had gotten her armor, but unfortunately, was unable to leave a wound.
Schera's up-swinged scythe sublimely stabbed into Gustav's jaw. It's tip could be seen penetrating through the front of Gustav's face. Gustav couldn't let out any screams at what intense pain must be running through his body. From his twitching mouth spilled volumes of blood.
Schera violently extracted her scythe, and Gustav's head was cut off with a sideways flash. Then, she sucked in a deep breath, and shorted in a large voice.

"I, Schera, have killed the enemy general Gustav!! The enemy's routed-, killed everyone you can reach-!!"

"OUUUUUUUUUU-!!"

A unit that had lost its commander was extremely brittle. On the other hand, soldiers in victory gathered strength. Gustav's soldiers that had lost their fighting spirit were all crushed, and their corpses littered the ground. Even so, it ought to be praised that they fought to the end.

In the end, no more than 3,000 of the Seventh Corps made it back to Wealth safely. The remaining soldiers had all died in battle.
The 30,000 First Corps was completely routed, more than half of them surrendered, and the rest died in battle or escaped.
The operation to invade Madros completely failed, and it ended with the Imperial Army suffering enormous injury.

Also, the commander of the First Corps Alexander had become a prisoner of the Kingdom's Army, and the commander of the Seventh Corps Gustav had died in battle. The Empire had lost all its war potential in the East, and the higher-ups were in great commotion.
The Kingdom began negotiations with the Empire using Alexander as leverage. First, they wanted the Empire to withdraw their troops from captured Kingdom territory, and also wanted them to pay indemnities. Furthermore, in exchange for the delivery

of Alexander, they wanted the Empire to hand over the Second Prince Alan. They sought to drive a wedge between the Empire and the Liberation Army.
The Empire agreed to withdraw their troops, but would not pay indemnities. Also, they completely refused to hand over Alan. First time negotiations ended in failure to reach agreement.
For the time being, temporarily established by continuing negotiations, a transient peace reached the Wealth and Madros Areas.

In the defensive battle for Madros this time, Schera's participation had been tremendous. She had made incredible achievements, taking three heads of division commander rank generals, taking the head of the Seventh Corps commander Gustav, and further capturing the First Prince of the Empire alive. She was enthusiastically praised by Kerry and Yalder, and she began being treated as a hero even in the Royal Capital. A letter of commendation from Prime Minister Farzam also arrived, and it was decided a medal would be conferred.
With such meritorious service, she was immediately approved for promotion to Colonel, and her adjutant Katarina was also cleared to be promoted to First Lieutenant.
As for Schera, rather than some promotion to Colonel, she was much for interested in the seed of the Wealth Potato she had obtained during the raid on the supply convoys.
She toyed with the seed potato, humming, trying to think of a suitable place to cultivate it.

"Lieutenant Colonel, congratulations on your promotion to Colonel. You are also famed in the Royal Capital as a Hero, the savior of the country. Is it okay to relinquish your name of Death God?"

For a Hero to have the nickname Death God was inauspicious and would become a topic of discussion, said Katarina as she wryly smiled. Schera laughed, not worrying at all.

"The name finally stuck, and wouldn't that be a waste. Isn't it suitable enough?"

"No problem then. Please call boldly call yourself Death God from here on as well."

"I shall. Good for you too getting promoted to First Lieutenant, Katarina."

Due to their successive losses, Katarina had said goodbye to promotion. Now she had finally been able to rise to First Lieutenant. Even after promotion, her duties wouldn't particularly change though.
She intended to work all the harder as Schera's adjutant.

"Sir, thank you very much! Also, Lieutenant General Yalder's reinstatement to General has been approved due to his achievements this time. He's in an extremely good humor, and he admires you, Lieutenant Colonel. Enough that he wants you as his daughter, he says."

That wasn't a joke, he truly considered taking her in as an adopted child, but he was stopped by Sidamo.
Saying he didn't want anymore chores pushed on him, he persuaded Yalder desperately it seemed.
Kerry also informed her that he wanted to accept her as a bride for Darus, who had safely survived, but Darus himself was begging in tears. It seemed he had some psychological trauma from almost being killed.
When Schera smiled, his face paled and he escaped, almost flying away.

"They also said that we'll get a bunch of medals. When I said please give me something delicious instead of those, I was laughed at."

Schera tossed the seed potato into the air like a beanbag, again and again. Katarina was having fun watching her.

"In this battle, many of my soldiers died too sadly. Very unfortunate."

"Sir, among 2,000, 600 have died in battle or are missing. However, everyone fought with bravery until the end."

"……It's really lonely; the people that eat meals together with me have decreased."

"We, will be serve you until our ends."

"Yeah. Mm, I'm okay. After all, I haven't killed enough at all. I want to eat a lot more. I want to kill a lot more. I can still fight. I will leave not one of the rebel army scum alive. That's what I've decided."

After smiling cheerfully, Schera preciously put the seed potato in her bag. She took Katarina back to the cavalry, where everyone was making a stew. It was a rich stew with many Wealth potatoes and fish they had gotten from Madros in it. It was really delicious.
In the spur of the moment, Yalder and Kerry, and also Darus with his face spasming, participated, and it ended up turning into a grand banquet involving the entire Madros castle,
Schera ate various delicacies, drank wine, and greatly enjoyed the feast with all of her comrades.

—-A room in Madros Castle.
After the feast was over, Yalder and Kerry were silently drinking together.
It wasn't high-grade liquor for victories, but it was good liquor that Kerry prided himself on and had prepared to thank Yalder for his efforts.

"Yalder. Sorry for pushing this inferior role on you this time. It was thanks to you that we were able to kill Gustav and protect Madros. I'm truly grateful."

Kerry poured drink into his cup. Yalder with his face full of bruises grimaced, and drank it all in one gulp.

"—-Hmph. Lieutenant Colonel Schera was the key figure for victory. I was nothing more than acting a buffoon. It would've been difficult to rout the Imperial Army without her. Schera splendidly lived up to expectations."

"…..Where did you find that thing, Yalder. I've never seen a such a monster-like woman before."

"She was originally nothing more than a private soldier stationed at Antigua. She distinguished herself all of a sudden, and now she's joined the ranks of heroes. At this rate, the future of the Kingdom is bright perhaps."

Muttered Yalder while recalling Schera's figure. Her brilliant success story was at the same time Yalder's story of suffering. She had talent that made him as a warrior jealous. But, it was a pleasure to have been able to fight together with her.
Him saying he wanted her as an adopted child was by no means a joke. If he could wed her to one of his sons and have her succeed his lineage, there would be no better happiness.

"……Yalder. There's one thing I want to ask. How can you have so much faith in Schera? Didn't you ever doubt if she would really betray the Empire? I only let you put on the act because I knew you would never turn traitor."

Kerry considered Yalder the foolhardy type of commander. At the same time, he knew Yalder also had a side as a firm warrior who would never harbor treachery. He had a dark countenance like that of a bandit, and he was an easily misunderstood human being.
He didn't know if that was good or bad for the person himself though.
Which is exactly why Kerry had Yalder act out the fake surrender and had him strike the Empire from behind.
Yalder had indignantly hit him because his pride couldn't bear the humiliating duty.

"Do you want to know, Kerry."

Yalder haughtily tilted his cup.

"I really want to know. Let me use it as reference later."

"—-Simply intuition. I had a feeling that she wouldn't turn traitor. And I fantastically won the gamble. Truly an auspicious matter."

"……I'm so surprised I can't say anything. I knew you were stupid."

That wasn't an answer, Kerry's expression said, and he poured himself more drink and gulped it down. With a triumphant expression, Yalder chewed on smoked meat that accompanied alcohol.
Yalder had sent Schera into the main body of the Imperial Army because he thought just himself wouldn't be enough.
A powerful poison was needed to break the Empire's large army. Just Yalder himself was severely insufficient. And, there was only one person under Yalder's command who could shoulder that important duty.
The female commissioned officer taking the alias of Death God. That cavalry carrying a black flag with a white crow coat of arms.
If he left it to her group, they would overrun the Imperial Army and cause ensuing

pandemonium, he felt.
That was all there was to it.

—-Message from the Royal Capital to Canaan.
There has been a staged attempt at a coup d’etat in the Royal Capital Blanca.
The ringleader was the eldest son of the Bazarov family, Colonel Gulf Bazarov and his faction.
He planned to assassinate the King and Prime Minister and schemed to seize power.
He was successfully prevented through the workings of Prime Minister Farzam’s agents.

The regiment in Canaan is to immediately restrain Sharov Bazarov and send him to the Royal Capital.
If he resists, take him dead or alive.
Barbora is hereby appointed as commander of Canaan as substitute.

Chapter 24: Lunch with the Field Marshal is Unusually Noisy but Delicious

One month after the Kingdom's Army and the Imperial Army fought at Madros.
In Madros Castle's audience room, the lord of the castle and commander of the Fifth Army, Kerry, and an uninvited guest were sitting across a round table from each other. Behind Kerry were waiting bodyguards fortified with heavy armor, and if the man in front of them had any strange behavior, they could immediately be take preparations for battle.
With only one youthful officer accompanying beside him, the man's smile didn't change even while basking in the animosity from the surroundings.
Kerry lightly cleared his throat, and then addressed the man in his usual tone.

"Yo. I want to say well done coming here, but sorry, you and I are mutual enemies now. Is it okay for you to come to this castle even knowing that?"

'Don't complain if I have your head cut off without talking to you,' spit out Kerry while putting his cup to his lips.
That man, with the name of Diener, replied in a calm tone.

"How cold. I have come to this castle as a man who loves peace. I hope Your Excellency can understand."

"Leave out that mimicry of yours. Don't make fun of me so much got it? My intelligence unit has their hands on what you're plotting under there. Aren't you quite the low-life sleazebag, spewing poison everywhere. The face of a beast would be more appropriate for you than anyone."

Kerry unpleasantly said. The Madros intelligence unit had their spies in not just the Empire, but also the Kingdom and the Liberation Army. For the sake of sniffing out impending crises beforehand of course. There was no positive proof, but reports said that there was an extremely high possibility that the talked about Tenang Atrocity had been orchestrated by the hands of the Liberation Army.
Countries or armies would always have a dirty side they wouldn't reveal. They wouldn't be able to mobilize or kill people if they tried to stay pure.

"Only what they find convenient will enter the ears of the populace. No matter if the Kingdom stands for justice, after all this, no one would believe it, and no one would even laugh at the idea of the Liberation Army disguising themselves as the Kingdom's Army and pillaging."

Informed Diener, his expression tender, but his eyes weren't smiling. If he made a single mistake, he wouldn't have a head.
Prepared for that, Diener had come along to Madros.

"It's as you say. No matter how the Kingdom denies anything, it'll only be excuses at this point. However, if it's just vilifying the Kingdom, I can do that whenever I like. Sorry, but I'm busy; I ain't got the time to go along with your jokes and the naivety of that foolish woman who can't tell reality from her dreams. If you've got actual business, hurry up and say it."

Kerry violently struck his cup on the table and glared at Diener with a gaze full of killing intent. Diener lightly shrugged his shoulders and began quietly talking.

"It is a simple matter. Until we capture the Royal Capital, I would like you to not move the Fifth Army from Madros."

"Are you even listening to yourself? What comes outta the mouth can't be taken back."

When Kerry raised his right fist, the bodyguards unsheathed their swords. There would probably be two corpses made in this room when that hand was swung down.

"Of course. Presently, the Liberation Army's fighting power, generously speaking, is 150,000. Though our morale is high, to be attacked from three directions, the north, south, and then the Canaan area, would be, as one would expect, quite arduous. I don't believe you would move, considering how prudent you are, but you abandoning Madros and turning all your forces towards us would be unstoppable, even for us."

"…..And your reason for explicitly telling me this? You intend to threaten me?"

"The instant you move your forces from Madros, the Imperial Army will launch a general offensive at this area. This is precise information gotten from Prince Alan. I also do not wish for further intervention from the Empire. Consequently, I have come to nail them down. I cannot let your troops move from here."

Stated Diener while lightly tapping his finger on the tabletop.

"We have the crown prince Alexander here as a hostage. If they come invade again, he'll lose his life."

"The Emperor Alf is not so half-hearted to prioritize a prince's life over expansion of his dominion. Accepting negotiations is also just to buy time to put military preparations in order."

Said Diener mixing fact with truth. Diener was currently watching whether the Emperor would prioritize Alexander's life.
He understood that the Empire didn't simply say yes in the negotiations because once they accepted one proposal, the demands would escalate to no end. Naturally, the hostage wouldn't be released.

"……So that's how it is. I understand what you're saying. But, your demand is completely rejected. Get out now that you know. You're an eyesore."

"That is unfortunate. However, I was glad to have been able to have a direct conversation with Your Excellency. If an opportunity arises, let us meet again. It surely will not be too far in the future."

"Hmph, I have no desire to meet with you. Hey, the guest is leaving. Show him out!"

"Sir-!"

Kerry stood up, indicating there would be no further conversation, and left behind the room. Diener and the officer accompanying him, Vander, were pushed by the soldiers and high-handedly made to exit the room.

"……Sir Diener. That became quite unpleasant."

Vander addressed his superior while straddling his horse. Negotiations had broken down with the worst possible result, he judged.

"I'm having a hard time understanding what was so unpleasant. Weren't the negotiations a resounding success? In the first place, I had achieved my goal of being able to meet Sir Kerry at this point in time."

"S, still."

"That man will absolutely not move from here. More than his loyalty to the Kingdom, he only thinks about how to protect the Madros territory. That's what makes that guy tick. Even though he put an end to my negotiations, that hasn't changed."

"If you understand that, then why would come directly, Sir Diener?"

"Preparations for after liberating the Royal Capital. I need him to defend against the Empire's expansion hereafter as well. Madros is an outpost region against the Empire, and the only ones who can accomplish that duty are those Madrosians. For that reason, this time's negotiation required us to meet face to face. After liberating the Royal CapitaI, I don't want be under a puppet regime, even if we were to be independent."

Diener stated his own thinking in a plain tone. The current monarchy had already fallen in his mind.
The aftermath was what was crucial. The Empire would doubtlessly come to interfere with the new political power. That was Emperor Alf's aim. For Diener, he had to keep Empire intervention to a minimum.
To begin with, the Empire tripping up this time had been an event beyond his expectations. It was unacceptable for the Kingdom to have a momentous comeback, but it was a blessing in disguise that the Empire's might had been curbed temporarily. Above that also, it was a godsend that the crown prince himself had been seized.
That was same as having the strongest card against the Empire for negotiations. The Imperial Army couldn't move with this.

At the same time, the Kingdom's victory invited unrest among the feudal lords who were currently on the fence, which made Diener's active projects more turbulent. The feudal lords didn't think the Kingdom would hold on like this, but it was also hard to believe that the Liberation Army would gain victory without problems. They once again drew inside their turtle shells, thinking that it would be best to wait and see.
In the southeast buffer zone with the Union were the Kingdom's Army, the Liberation Army, and the Union confronting each other, and they had fallen into a stalemate where no one could move.
For now, the only thing the Liberation Army could pursue would be to crush the main force of the Kingdom's Army, capture Canaan, and break into the Royal Capital. That was the only option.
If the flow of battle went in their favor at this point in time, all the people waiting-

and-seeing would all come under the Liberation Army's umbrella.
The key to this Liberation War would be the next battle. Likely, it would happen in-between Canaan and Belta, an engagement that would decide everything.

"……Vander. The next battle, is now something we must not lose. Serve with everything you have, with that in mind. The successes you earn will absolutely be rewarded."

Diener was buying Vander's abilities. Diener had been the cause for Field Marshal Sharov being dismissed, and he was the one who devised the attempted coup d'etat affair. Obviously, it was all a ruse; Sharov had no intention of rebelling. They had sowed discord into Prime Minister Farzam, and forcibly turned mere smoke into a raging fire.

"—-Sir, I know my duty!"

"I will head back to Belta from here and begin preparations before the battle. You take the funds and go provision some Cologne cows as arranged. They'll be our trump card in the next battle. Gather as many as you can. 1,000 at the minimum. Don't worry about their quality.

"Understood. ……However, just how will you use cows raised for their meat?"

"I'll be treating the soldiers to high-grade beef. Leave it at that for now. Soon, you'll understand."

Responded Diener, his mouth corners raising, and he began to gallop his horse. His guards too, with a slight delay, hurriedly followed after him.

The Cologne cow was a large cow that grew sharp horns and lived only in the North of the continent. It may seem like a docile beast at a glance, but once it sensed it would be in danger, it has a furious disposition where it would continue to chase its adversary no matter where it went.
Its meat was delicious, and coupled with its difficulty to capture, it was sold at high prices in the markets. Hunters would go out and hunt for Cologne cows, but there were frequent occurrences of them having the tables turned and being killed.

Having been promoted to Colonel and appointed to a certain duty, Schera leisurely marched, taking along 100 riders–while sucking on a long and thin carrot stick in her mouth. Occasionally, she would throw one in front of her horse, giving him something instead of feed. At any rate, there was more than enough of the vegetable sticks crammed into the pouch at her waist. Presenting several sticks wouldn't be much of a deal.

“Colonel, you seem to be in a good mood.”

“Mmnn, because I got this bag of vegetables before we departed. As congratulations for being promoted to Colonel. I’m glad I was promoted.”

Some children had come up to the hero, Schera, and asked her what she wanted as a gift. Hence when she responded that anything would be fine as long as she could eat it, she got this bag of vegetables the next day. Schera accepted it, more delighted than when she got some medal or a letter of commendation with its fastidious language.

“Good for you. Please allow us the privilege of congratulating your promotion afterwards.”

“Don’t push yourselves. That aside, you want one too?”

“Thank you very much I gratefully accept!”

Schera threw him a green stick, and the rider jumped at it, ecstatic. Schera began crunching another one, while thinking that he was like a trained dog.

Incidentally, Katarina, who was promoted to First Lieutenant, was away currently on a different duty. She was in charge of training the newly assigned soldiers who would replace the riders that had died in battle. Schera’s Cavalry had been allotted 3,000 riders. Yalder had boasted that if they gave her 10,000 cavalry, the head of the rebel army’s leader would be as good as theirs, but as there were still some doubts left about her leadership ability, despite her individual prowess being recognized, she was not permitted any further increases. Not intending to give Schera, whose birthplace was dubious, any more responsibility, Prime Minister Farzam’s opinion also played a big role.
Yalder had been reinstated to General, but at the same time, Barbora was also promoted from Lieutenant General to General.
As Barbora’s authority was greater since he had command over Canaan’s defense, Yalder couldn’t persist in forcing his opinion.
The two were famous for being like cats and dogs, but having his desire for promotion satiated, Barbora had more or less regained his rationality, and even when confronted by Yalder, he did not display any of his earlier hostility. Yalder had also survived through harsh ordeals and seemed to have matured as a human being, gaining the qualities of self-control and patience.
That being said though, that was just a story about the two Generals. The criticism and pressure towards Schera, the youngest ever to rise to Colonel in the Kingdom’s history, were exceedingly strong, and she was now showered in endless amounts of gazes, viscous with jealousy, envy, fear, and hatred.

The especially strong ones came from the Major Generals, since the next time Schera was promoted, they would be of the same rank. The fear of being caught up with and then overtaken by a person of commoner descent was extremely nerve-wracking. To them, having their positions superseded by this kind of human that they utterly looked down upon was unbearable.
The chief of which was Barbora’s trusted confidant for many years, Major General Octavio, and the next one was Major General Borbon. They repeatedly slandered Schera whenever something came up, and it wasn’t rare for them to be yelled at by an enraged Yalder. Barbora pretended like it had nothing to do with him as one would

expect, but even he ended up making an expression that said he was fed up with them.
Humans who had no interest in promotions like Major General Larus were honestly scarce in the Kingdom.

Hence, having been freed from the gazes of her rotten colleagues, Schera was extremely cheerful, and in the bright early afternoon, was leisurely travelling with her horse while humming.

"Colonel, a party of cavalry and carriage is coming from the front. Their flag is the First Army's."

"Alright, all members form ranks-! We will welcome His Excellency, Field Marshal Sharov!! Do not be discourteous-!"

"Sir-!"

At Schera's command, the cavalrymen split into two files and readied to welcome the Field Marshal's column of riders. Schera stood in their center and greeted the procession from the front.
The rider running at the head of the party proclaimed in a loud voice,

"Black flag with a white crow coat of arms, the brave and prestigious Colonel Schera I suppose! We are cavalry of the First Army attached to Canaan! Please take over the duty of escorting His Excellency Field Marshal Sharov!"

"Understood! I swear by this emblem that we will see the Field Marshal to the Royal Capital without fail!

Schera saluted, making a conscious effort to be as dignified as possible. Staff Officer Sidamo had really chewed her out earlier. "As a commander, you must put on *airs*," he had said. She really didn't know how to wear air, but it would be fine if she just appeared commanding, she guessed.

"Please see to it-! We must urgently return to Canaan's defense! Well then, please excuse us!"

After reporting only what was necessary, he turned his horse around, and the cavalry unit began racing away. The gist of the duty was extremely simple: escort Field Marshal Sharov, who was deprived of his military authority, to the Royal Capital. The reason why it took one month until the escort was because as his final service, Sharov had decided to curb the unrest in Canaan. There had been the possibility that soldiers who had sworn loyalty to Sharov would spontaneously blow up in frenzy, so they could not immediately deport him. The likelihood had been so great that Major General Larus and others had publicly declared that they would follow Sharov if he revolted. Thinking he must stop them, Sharov had personally set out to persuade them, and was somehow successful in getting them to understand.
Because Sharov, so deeply loyal to the Kingdom, had persuaded the soldiers seething with righteous indignation, he was stripped of his peerage and rank, and it seemed he would be executed on top of that.

Not understanding the logic of the world, Schera tilted her head. She had Katarina explain it to her, but as she thought, she couldn't understand. If they were going to annihilate the rebel army, she thought it would be more efficient to maintain Sharov's standing; however, she wasn't particularly interested in the matter, so she didn't put up a troublesome pretense of opposition. She couldn't help it, since she felt hungry when she thought about something she didn't care about. Eat, sleep, and fight. She wasn't very interested in anything else.

From the carriage came out Sharov restrained on both arms by guards, and he performed a salute with slow movements.

"Good work carrying out your duty. This would make for a good story, to be seen off by the heroic and illustrious Colonel Schera."

"It is an honor! This unworthy Schera has the privilege to devote her body and soul to escort Your Excellency to Royal Capital Blanca!"

Schera nimbly dismounted, straightened her back, and saluted. Because it was an unused to posture, her shoulders were stiff. Her stomach was also empty. Incidentally, 'unworthy' was something she heard was good to append before one's own name when speaking to a dignitary. If she did that, it was putting on "air." It was one of the words Staff Officer Sidamo taught her. She was also told not to use it too often.

"Hahaha-, there's probably no officer more unsuited to respectful language than you. It absolutely doesn't fit. It's truly disappointing that there was no chance for us to fight together. Even myself has wanted to see with these eyes, that prowess deserving of 'Death God.'"

"—-Sir-, this petty official also thinks it disappointing!"

"Well then, I'm relying on you on this journey, Colonel Schera."

"Understood-!"

While rubbing his facial hair, Sharov gently smiled. Schera had considered presenting a vegetable from the pouch at her waist, but the horses were greedily looking towards her, so she put it in her mouth instead.

En route to the Royal Capital.
—-A party had appeared, brought along by the Bazarov family's youngest daughter, but there weren't any particular problems, and the escort duty had proceeded. Because Schera decided for everyone to take a meal break, she had given Sharov the chance to talk to his granddaughter. There were some that thought it was out of Schera's goodwill, but she was actually hungry.

"……Anna… don't be rash. If the Colonel was 'on duty,' you would've already lost your head. Grief, what a small mercy."

"Grandfather, Sir Sharov. Come escape with us. If you go to the Royal Capital now, you will be killed. Those guys do not intent on listening to you. They intent on executing you with no right to trial. Even Father, even Mother, everyone has been brought there!"

Sharov's granddaughter, Anna Bazarov, raised her voice.
Schera acted like she didn't hear, and began wolfing down her boxed lunch. Only when she was eating a meal did she have to give her undivided attention. The other cavalrymen too began animatedly eating, making a din.

"Myself hasn't done anything bad, so why must I escape? Escaping would naturally be recognized as having something to be guilty about. Even if there were, for myself, the Field Marshal, to put on such a cowardly display is unacceptable. I have to directly meet with His Majesty and prove myself's innocence."

"However!"

"Listen well, Anna. You continue as you are, and go to the Union. Details are written in this letter. There are many of myself's friends over there. They'll surely treat you well."

"If Sir Grandfather will not go, then I will also go to the Royal Capital!"

"You cannot take part in this old man's selfishness. I wanted to do the same for the others to the best of my ability, but…. I fear that all of my relatives have been captured."

"Why, why is Sir Grandfather, who works himself to the bone, being treated like a criminal-!?"

Anna covered her face with both hands. Tears spilled out from them.

"In this world, there are many things which do not have a clear explanation. Even myself, now at this age, am learning. ……Though it seems the price I paid was a bit high…"

Sharov sighed with a weary expression.

"But-! That is ridiculous! I cannot accept it-!"

"This talk is over, Anna. You cannot presume upon the Colonel kindness forever. Go live in good health. We are always praying for your happiness."

Sharov sent a signal with his eyes, and the soldiers that had come along with Anna tightly held both her arms and dragged her away.
They were soldiers who had sworn loyalty to the Bazarov family, and they had more fealty than anyone. They would work for the Bazarov family to the end. It was a shame he couldn't reward their fidelity, Sharov thought.
There was some resistance from Anna, but perhaps she gave up before long, she began crying with stifled sounds. What would happen to her from now on, Schera was not in a position to know. Maybe she would be captured on the way and die. Maybe she would safely escape to the Union. Or maybe, she would apply herself to the

Liberation Army, but that would only be until she was killed by Schera's hands.
Schera threw the last piece of meat into her mouth, cleaned off the grease on her mouth, and breathed a satisfied sigh.

Sharov spoke up to apologize to Schera.

"Sorry, Colonel. For my relative's unsightly—-"

"This petty official was having a meal, and knows nothing. If the Field Marshal is ready, perhaps he would like to depart soon?"

"……mmm, I leave it to you."

"Schera's Cavalry will depart-! Begin the march!! Destination, Royal Capital Blanca!"

"Begin the march-! Raise the flag-!"

Schera began speeding up her horse with her scythe postured on her shoulder. While carrying a falsely accused sinner, Death's procession earnestly advanced to the Royal Capital.

After arriving at the Royal Capital, Schera was immediately ordered to head to Canaan, and wound up departing with no time to rest. Schera, who was looking forward to the Royal Capital's treats, complied with a sour expression, after clicking her tongue. It seemed she was never lucky in the Royal Capital, and she sighed all the while.
When they were about to separate, Sharov took Schera's hands and said, "I leave the Kingdom to you," quietly, but powerfully. When Schera lightly nodded, Sharov nodded many times, his body shivering with regret. Eventually, he was violently taken away by the Royal Capital soldiers who had grown tired of waiting.
Schera merely watched, expressionless. She didn't harbor any particularly strong emotions.
Before long, she took a vegetable out from the bag, held it in her mouth, and walked to join her comrades.

Sharov was entirely deprived of his peerage, territory, and rank, and above that, was accused for the crime of attempted rebellion, and imprisoned. He was not given a single opportunity to vindicate himself by the Kingdom.
After a week, Sharov died in prison. He had personally chosen a death not fit for a man of military, it was said, but it was gossiped among the people of the Kingdom that he was poisoned at the hands of Farzam. That there were more people who believed the latter was an indication of Prime Minister Farzam's low popularity.
Once even called a symbol of the Yuze Royal Family, the Bazarov lineage was wiped out. As for the family members, the men of age were given the capital punishment, those not of age and the females were dropped to commoner status, and this

rebellion was temporarily settled.
However, this attempted coup d'etat ended up planting suspicion in the military officers towards the Kingdom and the Prime Minister, and the seam between them widened day by day. Also, it could be called ironic that the internal insurrectionists that had been suppressed by Sharov's military fame began to move again.

Side Story: Maiden Called Hero Side Story

Inside the dim forest, Hero was aimlessly walking. Relying only on the slight traces of human traffic, she determinedly walked on the pathless path.
The sky was covered by the many trees, and she didn't have the slightest idea what time it was. She was sure it wasn't night, but there was not a ray of sunlight.
Sludge-like moss grew thickly on the ground, and the clutter of high standing trees erased all sense of direction.
She could sometimes hear the cries of birds or the howls of beasts from her environment. One almost couldn't feel any signs that humans had been here.
Sweat blotted her clothes, its abdomen area dyed red. The inside of her shoes were full of mud, and it felt disgusting just walking.
Her wounds had been healed but her body was terribly sluggish. Her head hurt, and she also felt a bit dizzy. Her stomach was also empty, and she wanted to wash her body.
Even if there was an inn right after she left the forest, she had no money, so there was nothing she could do.

"I guess…I'm camping again today. I feel like I'm walking around the same place in circles. If someone could just pass by, I could ask them for the road—-"

When Hero was feeling that she was at the limits of her willpower and stamina, she heard a weird noise coming from nearby.
That sound was clanging with regular intervals. Not a metallic kind of clanging, but something more dull than that.

"……Are there demons even here, I wonder."

Hero ran her eyes across the surrounding thickets while on alert. There were demons who would strike their stone axes on their shields to form groups and also to intimidate.
Much to her regret, the current Hero had no weapon on herself. All she had on her were her bloodstained clothes. It would become quite perilous if she was surprise attacked.
If they were to come, she would steal their weapon and kill them back. While thinking that, she slowly advanced towards the sound, her body tensed.
The strange sounds gradually drew closer. The interval between clangs also seemed to have become faster. It gave her the feeling that something was impatient.

"Next to that tree huh? Now, just what's over there hmm."

Before her eyes, was a large tree that appeared to have lived a considerable number of years. The dull sound was rippling from there.

When she pushed her way through the thickets and approached the big tree, the figures of two humans entered her eyes.
One was leaning against the large tree–a middle aged man with his eyes shut as if he was sleeping. A large baggage was next to him, so he was probably a merchant. But, when she looked closely, the man's face was terribly darkened, and maggots were swarming on it.
It seemed he used up all his strength somehow during a journey. It wasn't exactly a rare occurrence to be afflicted by sickness and collapse on the road.
The other human was a dark-haired young girl clad in filthy, tattered cloth. She looked to be about six to seven years old. She could tell at a glance from her pale cheeks, scrawny body, and crude appearance that she was of a poor social class.
That young girl had stones in both hands, and facing towards the man's corpse, was desperately striking the stones. She didn't know what the young girl was trying to do, but it seemed she hadn't noticed Hero at all.
Hero, for the time being, tried to talk to her.

"Hey… what've you been trying to do? Is striking stones a ritual to mourn the dead, maybe?"
"……."

No response came from the young girl. She didn't even look towards her. In a daze, she kept on striking the stones, over and over again. Sometimes her finger got caught it seemed; something red spread on the stones. Even so, she didn't decide to stop. Her thin hands tirelessly repeated the same action.
Maybe she couldn't understand language. In that case, it would be the same as talking to an animal.

"Hey… do you understand my words? I asked what you were doing."
"This, burn."

When she more emphatically asked the young girl, she got a response this time. Unlike an animal, it seemed words got through to her.
Also, she was able to understand what she was doing. This young girl was trying to make a fire.
But unfortunately, no matter how many years would pass, that wish would not come true. Striking two identical flints together would not start a fire. The young girl had probably learned the motion by watching others, but impossible things were impossible.

"With that method, you won't get a fire even spending a hundred years. If you don't strike that rock against a steel, you won't make any live coals. Even though it's just starting a fire, there are various procedures."
"……I see. Unfortunate."

The young girl seemed somewhat dispirited, her shoulders dropping, and simply because she was done with the two stones, she threw them away.
Then, she took out a rusty knife from the man's bag and grandly held it above her head, trying to stab the corpse.
Hero hastily called out to her.

"Wa-, wait just a moment! I don't know what grudge you have against him, but isn't he already dead?"
"Really, I thought to eat him after grilling him. Raw will break the stomach. But that

looks impossible, so I'll eat him like this. I'm so hungry I'm about to die."
"……You, are you perhaps trying to eat a human?"
"I want to eat meat. I tried eating the grass around here, but it was very bad and I couldn't eat it. There's food if I go home, but there's no share for me. I looked through this person's bag, but there was no food. So, I decided to eat the meat that fell here."

Hero felt a slight headache at these dull responses, but she decided to persuade her and make her stop. It wasn't really Hero's business, but she didn't want to see this kind of child fishing around for human carrion. Now that she knew, she couldn't overlook it.

"Stop the foolish business. Even if you're hungry, there are things one must not eat. Humans must not eat humans."
"……you too will, steal my food?"

Said the young girl in low voice that did not suit her outward appearance, turning towards Hero. A strong warning went off in Hero's mind. Don't be deceived by that childish appearance, it said. Take your attention off her and you'll be attacked– absolutely do not be negligent, it said.
As proof, the young girl's eyes became terribly hazy. From her half-open mouth dangled drool, and in her hand was gripped the rusted knife, as if to say she would devour Hero if she got in the way. There was probably nothing in the young girl's head but hunger. If she didn't have the figure of a young girl, those eyes would only remind one of a starving wolf.

"I won't eat such a thing, so no thanks. However, I cannot overlook you eating a human. There is no way I can overlook you becoming a demon. Because I'm a Hero."
"……That so. But, you really just want all the meat for yourself right. You also want to steal meat from me."
"There's no way I—-"
"Before, the dead body of a rabbit I brought home was all eaten up. Everyone had meat, but I got nothing but the bones. Yet I found the meat, that was so unfair."

The young girl slowly stood up, lowered her hips, and leaped towards her. Her movements were rough and full of openings, but her killing intent was on par with demons. The knife aside, if Hero was bitten in a bad spot, she wouldn't be able to avoid death.

"You brat-!"

Hero knocked away the knife thrusted at her, and grabbed the young girl by the throat. Though she had just awoken
, she hadn't weakened so much that such a sloppy attack would hit her.

"—–!!"

Despite the young girl being in anguish, she struggled with both hands and both feet, putting up a frantic resistance. Of course Hero didn't intent on killing her, but it was clear that the instant she let go of her, she would be attacked.
Hero brought their faces as close together as possible and tried to intimidate her.

"Just spirit won't amount to anything. You're still too naive. —-Listen well, you

gluttonous gourmand girl. If you promise not to attack me, I will release you. If you can't promise me, I'll strangle you here."
"—-…–!!"

The young girl bared her teeth and shook her head side to side. It seemed she fully intended on attacking her. She completely took Hero to be a thief that would snatch away her food.
More than she feared being killed was her anger towards having her food stolen, it appeared.

"Quite a nerve you've got. But, even when kids are my opponents, I go at it seriously. Because I won't hesitate to kill demons. Think carefully."

Still, the young girl shook her head sideways. Moreover, it was faint, but the corners of her mouth were raised, probably her determination indicating, 'if you're going to do it, then hurry up and do it.' Absolutely by no means was this an expression appropriate for her age.

"Even though she's just a brat, she's got some guts. Wait, this isn't a time to be admiring her."

Hero, still seizing the young girl's throat, was troubled. Killing her like this would definitely leave a bad taste in her mouth. But, she would be attacked again for certain if she released her. Just what should she do in this situation?
It had been a blunder to go investigate the scene in the first place. If she didn't know, she would've walked right past. It was entirely her fault that she got embroiled in this trouble.
After thinking like that for a short while, Hero decided to suggest a compromise.

"Then, let's do this. You want to eat meat so much you're willing to die. I can't overlook you eating human meat. Therefore, I will prepare some other meat for you."
"……Other… meat?"
"I will hunt an animal around here and feed it to you. How's that sound?"
"……..."

Hero asked for confirmation, and the young girl finally nodded her head obediently. The murkiness of her eyes thinned to some extent, and it seemed she had regained her senses. Though in exchange, the volume of drool coming from her lips had increased. As a bonus, her stomach was also making sounds.
Tired, Hero unintentionally let out a sigh.

"This should be good."

Using the rusted knife that the young girl had, Hero brought down a pitiful wild rabbit and wild bird.
Inside the bag the man left behind were some utensils that seemed to be used for cooking, so she helped herself without reservation.
She appropriately took off the fur and skin and removed the entrails. She cut the red meat dripping with blood into suitable sizes with the knife, stuck them on an iron spit, and thrust the handle into the ground.
She bunched together the woodchips she had scraped up, started a fire with magic,

and heartily began cooking them. An aroma that stimulated the appetite began drifting about the area.
The young girl was sitting and watching her work, but she had a face that said she was at her limits. Though it was only half cooked, she reached out her hand, and Hero unreservedly slapped it away.
While holding back her hand, the young girl made the saddest expression she had made so far–the face of a young child who had her precious toy taken away.

"Wait a bit more until it's done cooking. Eat something half-done and you'll break your stomach."
"It's fine if it breaks; I want to eat right now."
"Jeez, your gluttony goes so far it's amazing. Well, this one looks the most cooked, so put this in your mouth."

She passed the young girl a spit with small meats stuck on it. The young girl made a whole-face smile and indulged in them. She didn't immediately swallow; she chewed them well and savored the juices. After much time had passed and she finished them, she had an expression of supreme bliss. This was the first time Hero had seen a human that enjoyed a meal to that extent, so she spontaneously burst into laughter.

"Even though there's no seasoning, you have a face like you've eaten a feast. You must've really been hungry."
"Delicious. Hey, is this one almost done?"
"It's slightly charred so it's fine to eat. I'm, fine with just this one so."

Hero urged her to go ahead and eat, and the young girl resumed her meal, holding skewers in both hands. The area around her mouth was drenched in meat juices. Not caring at all, she shoved the next piece, and then the next piece, into her mouth.
Hero was also hungry, so she grabbed the closest skewer and bit into the meat. It was brimming with the flavor of the wilderness. She wished she had some spices to cover up the bad smell, but she probably couldn't ask for such luxuries here.
After not even thirty minutes, the young girl had finished all the meat. Hero had only eaten one skewer, but just looking at the young girl made for full, so she didn't particularly complain.

"Hey, what's your name? I'll praise that fearsome gluttony of yours and listen to it, once."
"I'm Schera. I live in a village close to this forest."

The young girl calling herself Schera carefully licked the grease stuck to her hand. Perhaps because she was satisfied with her stomach full, the turbulence had completely vanished from her eyes.

"And in that village, is your family?"
"There is, but they said they don't need me. They tried to sell me, but I looked like I'd die immediately so I wasn't sold, they said. So I was told that I was useless in the family. They give me barely any food."

Even though the Demon King had died, it seemed this world hadn't changed. It hadn't changed at all from Hero's time. It appeared she could hear many more of these kinds of stories from hereafter.
She could easily understand the slave dealer's reason for not buying Schera. Looking at that complexion and body, it was unavoidable to be deemed she wouldn't live long.

However, she felt a sense of discomfort somewhat listening to Schera indifferently explaining her own circumstances. If she acted more her age, Hero thought she should be crying more.

"How old are you? Compared to your appearance, I feel like you behave admirably mature."
"Probably around six years old. I don't really care about age so, I don't really remember. The only thing important is what can I eat today."

Said Schera, turning back to the man's corpse. Seeing Schera licking her lips, Hero felt a bad premonition and gave her a warning.

"Like I said, stop turning your appetite towards humans. Starting now, fix that outrageously bad habit."
"Can I just try eating one bite? I'm curious what it tastes like. Just one bite."
"Absolutely not. Also, it tastes disgusting, so give it up."
"You've eaten humans before?"
"Isn't it obvious I haven't? Don't ask stupid things."
"You haven't, so how do you know it's disgusting?"
"……Th, that's… you know, because it clearly sounds disgusting."

Was it really disgusting? She had no way of knowing. Having said that, she also couldn't take a bite and check. First and foremost, harboring appetite for fellow humans would make one no different from a demon.

"Taste aside, if you eat a human, you'll turn into a demon. So you can't. You absolutely can't."

Declared Hero, though she was artlessly lost for words.

"Why do you turn into a demon after eating humans?"
"Just because."
"Then, animals that've eaten humans will also turn into demons?"

Schera raised questions in rapid-fire. She wasn't trying to argue her down; they felt like genuine questions.
Would animals that eat humans turn into demons? Probably not, Hero thought. Even if a wolf were to eat this corpse, that would be an all too reasonable event. It was nature's providence so to speak.
But, things that only targeted humans, and more so revelled in eating them, could be none other than a demon. So far, only those dreadful things had a rotten smell. Even if they had been formerly human. Naturally, she had slaughtered them all, and she would hereafter as well.

"Those guys that gleefully eat humans will turn into monsters. Whether they be animal or human!"
"Then, why are we fine even though we eat other animals? I joyfully ate rabbit and bird, but I'm not turning demon."
"……Why, you ask…"
"Are only humans special? Why's that?"

Hero was hard pressed for a reply. 'That's just how it was,' was the only thing she could say. That didn't explain why it was okay to eat, but humans couldn't live if they

didn’t. Same with other animals.
Were only humans permitted to eat other animals? To begin with, who decided what and what not to permit? It was a somewhat difficult question for Hero, who wasn’t a clergyman. She hadn’t seen God before, and so also didn’t believe in Him.

—-But, there was one thing she could say.

“Anyway, humans must not eat humans. Because I, the Hero, said so. There’s absolutely no mistake. As for the other trifles, think about them after you grow older!”
“Humans, must not eat humans.”
“Right. It’s an absolute absolute, because I, the Hero, said so!”
“Ohhh.”

Responsed Hero, sticking out her chest, and Schera quieted down. But, her gaze went towards the man’s corpse again. She didn’t understand at all it seemed.
Hero scowled at Schera.

“Hey you, you intent on sneakily eating it after I leave huh. It’s written all over your face.”
“Really?”

Schera began feeling and patting her face. Her small face became smeared with grease.

“I meant that’s what your face was showing. ……Alright, then let’s do this. If you promise that you won’t eat humans from now on, I will get you much more meat. Also, I’ll teach you how to make a fire. How ‘bout it?”
“I can eat more meat?”

Schera took the bait.

“Right.”
“What if, I break that promise then?”
“Nothing really. You’ll just become a human that doesn’t keep her promises. However, humans that don’t keep their promises won’t be able to enjoy their meals I’d say.”

Responded Hero with something suitable that came to mind, but Schera was intently listening.
After thinking about it a while, Schera deeply nodded.

“Got it. I will never eat humans. Promise.”
“You’re promising a Hero. If you break it, I’ll know immediately.”
“Never, break.”
“Alright, well I shall go search for game again. Something bigger than the last one. I’ll teach you how to make a fire after that.”

Hero randomly strolled around the area, searching for game. She sort of didn’t discover anything, but finally, she successfully brought down a giant boar.
She took out a fire starting tool that was in the man’s bag, and then taught Schera the method for starting fire using a flint and flint hammer. Using finely crushed or small pieces of dried leaves, a fire gradually grew bigger. This was something Hero’s companion had taught her a long, long time ago. It was one of the fundamental knowledges when on a journey.

Hero didn't know if Schera would make use of this from now on, but because she promised that she would teach her, she patiently did so. Promises had to be kept.

"It won't be easy to finish all of this."
"Can I eat all of it?"
"Learn what 'Moderation' means."

After spending time and disassembling the boar, Hero taught Schera a way to preserve the animal so it would last a long time, as well as how to judge if meat was rotten or not while she was at it. Schera intended to eat the large animal in its entirety right here, but it was obviously impossible.
She didn't think this knowledge would fundamentally solve her problems, but at least Schera seemed really happy that she would be able to eat meat tomorrow again.
In the end, Hero buried the man's corpse. She willfully used his tools, so she had to say thanks. Schera also helped out by the way.
After the job was over start to finish, the area had become dark. The forest didn't have any sunlight streaming in in the first place, but the darkness had further thickened.

"With this, I've finished teaching you all I can. All that's left is for you to keep your promise."
"Thanks."

Schera regardfully put the remaining meat in a bag and then said her thanks. Compared to when she was eating, it felt less sincere, but Hero thought of that as just part of her personality.

"By the way, is there a big road around here? I can't live if I don't earn money somewhere."
"Go straight from here and there'll be a large river. Downstream of it is a large city called Arte, so the villagers say."
"I see, thanks for telling me. Ahh, are you going back to your village alone? I can send you back if that's the case?"

Enquired Hero, but Schera nodded saying she was fine.

"I know this area well, fine."
"Oh. Well, take care of yourself as much as you can. Don't eat rotten meat okay."

Hero waved her hand, and then left behind the place. Schera stood stock still, not particularly saying anything.
Hero found the river she was looking for and was putting her thoughts in order while walking along its current.
After this, would Schera live without problems? That was quite hard to believe. She was called useless by her family, and it seemed she wasn't receiving adequate meals. They probably disliked killing her themselves, so they were hoping she would hurry up and die. Poverty taken to the extremes would easily thin the bond between parent and child after all.
Continuing to hunt in the forest was also difficult with Schera's constitution. She would only be able to forage for mushrooms or fruits from trees, or maybe search for animal carcasses. There were also many dangerous animals in the forest. There may also be robber types of people hiding. Good luck could not continue forever. Tomorrow, she may be on the side of being eaten.

Even knowing that, Hero could not do anything. There were a great many children like Schera, and she couldn't save every individual one. A Hero wasn't God. She couldn't go around giving salvation to those seeking it.

In the end, there was only one thing Hero could do. —-To kill, and kill, and kill all of the demons. It was only for that sake that a Hero existed, that Hero existed.

"……Really, this world sucks as ever."

Hero sighed, when,

"Hey."
"——!!"

A voice suddenly came from immediately behind her, and Hero hastily created created distance and turned around. There, was Schera's figure, head tilted quizzically.
Hero had been concentrating on her thoughts, but she hadn't been negligent with her guard. To have her back taken was the same as already having received a blow. If Schera had intended to kill her, there would probably already be a knife sticking out of her back.
Hero hadn't intended on being careless, but she was unable to notice her.

"I forgot to ask earlier, and I was thinking if you could tell me…"
"Don't talk to me all of a sudden from behind me. I almost reflexively smacked you with everything I had."
"I'm sorry."

Not, her face truly said. Hero had only known her for a short while, but she somehow knew.

"……So, what do you want to ask me?"
"Is it okay to eat demons?"
"……ha?"
"Is it okay to eat demons?"
"……You, want to eat demons?"

Checked Hero while stunned. There was no sign of this gluttonous girl before her eyes joking. She looked serious.
For her appetite to be of this degree might even be considered a type of talent. Though she didn't know if it would be helpful or not.

"I really want to try eating one."

Was it okay to eat demons? Could one even eat them in the first place? Hero hadn't thought of something so ridiculous, and also didn't think she wanted to eat one. There was probably no reason why one mustn't. If they hadn't been formerly human that is. There were many who had outward appearances of animals or bugs. Those guys weren't anything that would cause a rush of appetite. In fact, they made one want to squash them.

"W, well, as long as they weren't formerly human, I think it's fine? But, you'll surely hurt your stomach. Those guys are rotten by nature."
"Got it. If I find one some day, I'll try eating one. Speaking of which, what do demons look like?"

Not at all getting it, Schera asked again.

"You'll know with one look. They have atypical appearances different than humans. I'm telling you this now, if you do find one, run away as fast as you can. If you don't want to die that is."
"Thanks for teaching me so many things. Bye then."

Schera's lips happily bent, and while happily striking the fire starters, walked into the forest.
It seemed Schera could somehow kill her own presence. She had probably naturally done it to herself with all the times she'd entered and exited the forest up until now. Hero didn't think she would die for the time being in that case. That wouldn't fill her stomach though.
After Hero watched Schera's retreating figure, she sat down on the spot with a complicated expression. But, after becoming unable to bear it after a short moment, she stopped stifling her laughter.

"—-Kukuh, ahahaha-, first time seeing someone so stupid that wants to eat demons. Have humans become stronger? Or have demons become weaker. Either way, that gluttonous girl probably wouldn't lose to them. I have to annihilate the demons, before she eats all of them."

Hero vigorously sprang up, fearlessly laughed, and glared at her surroundings. There were four people visiting her. They were probably highwayman types that targeted travellers. They had human appearances, but they needed no mercy.

"I show no forgiveness to humans who have fallen to demons. You men who smell rotten, I will massacre you all. Ah, I won't eat you or anything, so rest easy and die."

Hero bared her teeth and held out a hand, When dazzling white light issued from it, the highwayman postured with their weapons and flusteredly jumped at her.

"—-T, this girl, can use magic!"
"Shit-! Quickly, kill her-!"
"Too slow, you fools."

The white light burst, and four shrieks echoed in the forest.
It seemed she held back a bit too much; they were still living, on the verge of death. Because she had just awoken, she wasn't back to her normal condition, she guessed. Normally, she could turn them into small pieces with one blast.

"I'm still not back to normal huh. How honestly irritating."
"S, spare us—-"
"You hurt my ears; don't speak the human language."

The highwaymen weeped and begged for their lives, but disregarding them, she stepped their faces. With magic, she killed the ones who had escaped death. There was no negotiating with demons. She had decided that long ago.

After washing the filth from her body in the nearby river, she lied down in the shallows and gazed at the starry sky.

What kind of people would there be at the city she was heading to? What kind of demons would there be? What would she do over there?
After thinking about various things, Hero slowly closed her eyes.
The last thing Hero thought, was that she currently looked like a drowned body, and nothing more–something so trivial.

Chapter 25: Crops Grown Yourself Will Absolutely be Delicious

Chapter 25!? ‘Where’s 24: Lunch with the Field Marshal is Unusually Noisy but Delicious’ you ask? Ufufu go look for it.

The day after the veteran general Sharov died in jail. There were many people secretly mourning in Royal Capital Blanca. Rumors had spread that the attempted coup d’etat incident was a fabrication of the Prime Minister’s, and everyone sympathized with the wiped out Bazarov family. Voices of dissent were raised not only among the populace, but even amongst the soldiers.

The character known as Prime Minister Farzam had no popularity in any case. Among the people, he was regarded as the ringleader behind all the exploitation; among the soldiers, he was reviled as the main cause of their insufficient wages; among the military officers, he was made fun of as the someone who proudly rose to his position only through flattery; among the civil officials, they hated the way he wielded his power as much as they hated serpents. Even Barbora who had a favorable relationship with Farzam innerly looked down on him.
Although the people’s evaluations of Farzam weren’t wrong, in the first place, the greatest cause was also King Kristoff not concerning himself with politics.
The King did nothing but seclude himself in the royal palace, having women waiting upon him and drowning in sensual pleasures, and if he felt like it, he would offer a prayer to the Star God for his eldest son who had left the world at a young age.
This man no longer had any interest in what would become of the Kingdom. There was not a trace left now of his triumphant face when he had won the succession struggle and took the throne.

“Your Majesty, please excuse me for interrupting your pleasure. This is Farzam.”

Farzam respectfully greeted Kristoff, who with clothes disordered and face pale languidly propped himself up. Next to him lay two concubines, wearing only thin lingerie on their bodies and looking up at Kristoff with bewitching gazes.
After important matters had been sanctioned, Prime Minister Farzam, the only man given approval to enter Kristoff’s private room, would thus came to report. Judgement of right from wrong was entirely done by Farzam, and the King only received the after reports. He basis for that judgement was only whether or not it benefitted him. The Prime Minister in essence held the highest authority in the Kingdom.

“……Farzam huh? What do you want at this hour?”

It was already afternoon, but Kristoff had no feeling of time. He signaled to his concubines, making them prepare drinks. The dim room became almost chokingly saturated with the smell of spirits and the stink of a man and woman’s intercourse.
Farzam proudly began to speak while smiling.

“Sir. Sharov, the man behind the rebellion, has died in jail, so I have come to report.”

"……I see. So Sharov died huh. The man once even called the cornerstone of the Kingdom."
The gaze of Kristoff's lifeless eyes wandered. His concubine passed him a glass with alcohol in it, but he didn't react.

"Your Majesty, what is the matter? Are you not feeling well?"

"……"

Not moving and still sitting on the bed, he gripped the glass. He showed no signs of saying anything.
Judging that he was acting as usual, Farzam continued to report on another matter.

"…….About negotiations with the Empire, I have requested mediation from the Star Church. A pastor I am well acquainted with is proceeding to the Empire as an emissary. Likely, negotiations for an armistice will be settled in the not too far future."

"……."

"Also, I have given General Barbora, newly appointed to commander of the First Army, orders to recapture Belta. With the Empire's first attack foiled right now, the rebel army will absolutely collapse if we inflict a decisive blow here. Soon, days of peace will visit the Kingdom, no doubt about it."

Now that his greatest political adversary, Sharov, had been eliminated, Farzam had nothing to fear. Due to the activities of the Death God he had heard about, the Empire had self-destructed on their own. After that only remained crushing the eyesore rebel army. For that sake, he had reinforced Canaan with an elite unit of 50,000. A large force of 150,000 was now gathered in Canaan.
He had also sent messenger to the Fifth Army in Madros in the North and the Second Army in the South, telling them to head towards Belta. There was no way the mish-mash rebel army could handle a large offensive from three directions.

"……Farzam. It's thanks to you that I was installed to this position. I am incompetent, and a human with no redeeming features whatsoever except being born as a member of the royal family. I don't have a single part of me that would win against my dead older brother. Even I understand that. It was thanks to your efforts that I could acquire the throne. I'm grateful from the bottom of my heart."

Said Kristoff smiling like a reptile.

"……Your Majesty, what are you saying? Without Your Majesty, the Kingdom—-"

Farzam was perturbed at these unexpected words. He hastily went to say flattery, but Kristoff interrupted him in a strong tone.

"Consequently, though you decided to implicate and kill my loyal retainer Sharov, though you decide to endlessly wallow in your own profit, I will permit it. I don't mind if you use my name and wield my authority as you please. I permit you to."

"……Y, Your Majesty?"

"—-But, when something happens, the only thing I won't permit is abandoning me. You and I share a fate. Only you surviving and living, I won't have it. When my

Kingdom crumbles, I'll have you die with me-"

Throwing aside the glass, Kristoff roughly tossed letters from out of his breast pocket. Those, were confidential messages that Farzam had secretly sent to influential nobility in the Union. Letters absolutely not to be seen by the King. They were something that should not have existed.
They were insurance in case the Kingdom was defeated by the rebel army. They were proof of betrayal, and by all rights it wouldn't have been strange for him to be immediately granted death.

"T, those are-!?"

"An insolent spy that had creeped into my bedroom so kindly left them here. Wasn't he your subordinate? If he was of the rebel army, I would probably no longer have my life. ……It seems you have no popularity even among the subordinates under your supervision. But, I don't care. I permit you to. I saw nothing."

Said Kristoff as he tore and threw away the secret messages. With a desperate look, Farzam tried to explain.

"Y, Your Majesty. You are mistaken. I work only for—-"

"I don't need your excuses. You're dismissed. Exterminate the rebel army immediately and bring Altura's head before me. I put my expectations in you, Prime Minister Farzam."

Simply said Kristoff, and he collapsed on the bed with a weary expression. Beside him lay down the concubines, joining him.
Having lost his bearings, Farzam left the King's bedroom, his complexion pale.

"Ridiculous-! How did those secret messages get in His Majesty's hands-!? Just who-!?"

Farzam's intelligence unit that he had raised was comprised of staving and dying orphans who he had rigorously trained and brainwashed so they would absolutely obey his orders.
Consequently, it was entirely improbable for them to betray. He had driven into them that if he gave them the order to die, they would carry it out.

(But, I can only think that there is a traitor on the inside. ……Maybe I need to investigate.)

The ones who did the work in the shadows so that Kristoff could take the throne had been Farzam's intelligence unit. They broadcasted a scandal of Kristoff's older brother, seized the weaknesses of the influential, assassinated, threatened, kidnapped, anything they could do they did.
Many agents had died along the way, but Farzam had thus ascended to Prime Minister, and Kristoff had ascended to the throne.
His agents would die for their benefactor who had gathered them. They were probably delighted in hell too, thought Farzam from his heart.

(……Hmph, what drivel. He sure acts haughty for a mere puppet. Well fine, I won't lose. I won't ever let go of this power. This country is mine. I won't hand it over to anyone. Like hell I'd hand it over-"

Having risen to Prime Minister from a mere retainer, Farzam's attachment and his desire for political power was almost unnaturally strong, and the sole thing that could stop him, the King, was utterly apathetic towards politics. And that's what had been rapidly eating away at the mighty Kingdom.
The infamy of these two would be left behind to posterity as Feebleminded Kristoff, and Sycophant Farzam

Having finished their escort duty, Schera's party had departed from the Royal Capital and temporarily stopped by at Cyrus Fortress before heading to Canaan. It was to link up with Katarina and the others who had finished training. These new recruits, who had even been unsteady on their horses, had now become able to fairly manage their horses.
Though Katarina, who was in charge of their training, wasn't satisfied at all.

"Hey you conscript-! How many times do I have to tell you 'don't be manipulated by your horse' before you understand!? What's packed into that head of yours!? Shall I'll try opening it up-?!"

"P, please excuse me, First Lieutenant!! W, wahh-!"

The instant the new recruit looked away, he fell off his horse and became muddied. Katarina's face turned red, and she tightened the grip on her cane.

"…….If you don't get my words, I can only drill it into your body. Like a horse, I'll discipline you until you break."

She took out a whip from her waist. After flexibly waving it around, she menacingly whipped the ground. The new recruit's face changed from pale to white. The other soldiers watching acted like they didn't see anything.

Schera, showing up at the training grounds, spoke up to the trainer who was swinging around a whip with a dangerous smile floating on her face.

"Katarina. Well done training them. How are these reservists I wonder. They seem decently enthusiastic."

"Eh, ah! Colonel! Y, you have returned?"

Quickly hiding the whip, Katarina saluted. Having suddenly thought of a good idea, Schera, while licking a hard candy, suggested,

"You rather fit the part. If you want, you should lead the cavalry instead of me. I don't know war tactics well after all. How about it I wonder, Katarina. I think it's a good

idea.”

Schera *pon pon* patted Katarina’s shoulders. Not joking around, Schera was wickedly serious. If Katarina said yes, she would actually be the commander probably. She promptly refused.

“Y, you joke! This cavalry owes its existence to the Colonel! It is extremely unfit for the likes of me!”

“Quite adept at flattery, Katarina. Suit yourself. By the way, what happened to /that/ I wonder.”

“S, sir, those are also growing well! They sprouted the other day!”

“I see. Then I’ll go check. Good work training for such a long time, First Lieutenant Katarina.”

Schera threw away her scythe and walked in the direction of the castle’s courtyard. Katarina thought to prop the scythe up on the wall, taking it in her hands, but its weight was more than she imagined, and she couldn’t lift it. She lost her balance, and the scythe loudly hit the ground. The surrounding soldiers curiously observed her at the sound.

“Kuhh- I knew it was heavy-! But if I don’t easily swing this around, I can’t become like the Colonel.”

The Colonel’s physical strength was indeed fearsome, thought Katarina to herself. She pushed up her glasses, and nodded many times.

“U, um, shall I help you?”

“H, hey, that’s the Colonel’s scythe—-”

The new recruit from earlier, unable to stay idle, approached. It seemed he misunderstood that Katarina was weak. The other soldiers tried to stop him, but their warnings didn’t reach the new recruit’s ears.
With a mischievous and cruel smile, Katarina ordered the new recruit.

“Good. Carry the Colonel’s scythe back to the barracks. Do it by yourself. You’ll go without food until you’re finished carrying it. By all means, if you find it impossible, come crying to me.”

“Understood! Even a child could do something like that!”

“……I see. I look forward to it.”

The new recruit proudly drew near the scythe after subtly insulting Katarina. Able to imagine the outcome, Katarina lightly sighed and headed to the barracks afterwards. The new recruit… would come crying to her three hours later.

Cyrus Fortress Courtyard. Several fields were plowed squarely in a corner. There, was planted the seed of the Wealth Potato that Schera had brought home from the Empire as a spoil of war. Taste aside, it grew quickly, was strong against disease, and could be cultivated without regard to environment. Even in this mountainous area of Cyrus, it was sprouting favorably.

"……Sprouts are coming out. This many. I'm really looking forward for them to grow up."

Stooped over, Schera was gazing zealously at the small sprouts. A soldier coming to water them called out to her.

"Welcome back, Colonel. If you want, do you want to try planting one too, Colonel? It is kinda noisy over there with everyone trying to plant all the remaining ones so."

"……But, I, farmwork—-"

A hazy memory flashed in the back of Schera's mind for only a second. A poor lifestyle, an all-consuming hellfire, a brandished naked sword, scattering fresh blood, the smell of impending death, a brigand with a vulgar smile, Death's scythe on her thin neck.
Then what? She…
A nearly heinous sense of hunger assailed Schera. She frantically endured while trying not to let it show on her face.

"C'mon, it is just burying a seed potato. …….Hey, are you okay, Colonel? Your complexion—-"

"…….I'm fine. I'll also go try planting some then. Be careful so I don't accidentally eat one."

"Haha-, it is not like you will get poisoned eating it, but please do not eat them if you can help it! If you persevere, one will multiply to dozens afterwards, and we will take them home!"

"Indeed, I'll be patient as much as I can."

Joked the soldier, and Schera lightly brushed her hands and stood up. She threw the last vegetable from the pouch at her waist into her mouth. At first, it had a dull, flour-y taste, but it gradually exuded a sweetness. It seemed to be a fruit pretending to be a vegetable. A dried apple. Since it was dried, so she couldn't judge if it had been red or green. It didn't look to good, but the more she chewed it, the more delicious it became. Schera chewed the dried apple slice to her heart's content.
Her sense of hunger abated a little.

"Hey hey, say what you like, but you're crowding them too much. Do it more like this, evenly."

"We're making a potato field inside a fortress; that'll only make the military police

mad. Shouldn't we make it as small as we can?"

"Hmf, and just what's wrong with a self-sufficient fortress? If they have complaints, I'll kick 'em around. C'mon, spread them out! The earth's nutrients won't spread to all of them!"

"Jeez, don't go too far or you'll bring trouble for the Colonel, wait, C, Colonel!?"

"S, salute Colonel Schera-!!"

"Welcome back, Colonel Schera!"

A youthful man, noticing Schera, hastily stood up and saluted. The surrounding men covered in mud followed suit.
They raised their voices, and welcomed their superior officer's return.

"At ease. Continue your work. Actually, I thought you'd allow me to plant potatoes too."

Schera pointed at the wooden box with seed potatoes inside. There were still a few dozen left.

"Sounds great! With the Colonel's divine protection, they'll to grow up properly I bet!"

"After we harvest them, let's call them 'Death Potatoes' and sell them to the guys in other units."

Joked in a low voice a young man while cheerfully whistling.

"The Colonel can hear you, you big retard-!!"

.The youthful man pushed that carefree man. Laughs leaked out from the surrounding men. When the youthful man glared at them, they frantically shut their mouths.

"I said 'at ease' right? So don't worry about it."

More importantly, Schera urged him to hurry and hand over a seed.

"Hehe-, then Colonel, please take this."

"Thank you very much. ……Like this I wonder."

Schera was handed a seed potato from the young man and buried it in a small hole in the field. The soldiers gently covered it with soil.

"Perfect, Colonel!"

Elated, Schera steadily planted the seed potatoes, and an hour later, had used up everything in the wooden box.

"Fuu, well done, Colonel. We're done with the seed potatoes now. They'll be fine if we reliable take care of the field afterwards. From what I heard though, these potatoes will grow fine even if we leave them alone."

"……I see, it was very interesting. It might not be bad to grow one's own food."

"I'll say. But the fun part is after a few months. Cooking something you grew yourself, and then eating it with gusto together with everyone. That is when it feels most worth it."

While excitingly smiling, the youthful man actively shook off the mud on his hands.

"Well, that's if they aren't all taken away by the higher-ups. Really, there's nothing good about being a farmer."

The young man gave a bitter smile while scratching his own head. The crops they raised themselves would all be theirs–there was no such happiness.
No matter how much they produced, their crops would be taken away as tax. After the terrible harvests, they would all be taken away during tax collection time. The reason the man enlisted was because of food troubles. If someone didn't earn money, his family couldn't live.
For the peasants of the Kingdom, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to call these few years hell. Even so, that they somehow hadn't starved to death was because everyone had their secret fields. As this final amount of food was given with priority to the workers, there wasn't anything given to the useless.
It was very much like Schera's former condition.

"These are our spoils of war, so they're all ours. We just have to take care that the military police don't take them."

Muttered one soldier while glaring at the military policemen peeking over at them. Later, there was the danger of having their field dug up and cleared.

"……I see. I know, let's make a notice so no one will dig it up."

Using a nearby piece of scrap wood, Schera created a simple sign. The cavalry members were watching, interested.

"Colonel, what will you carve?"

"That it's our field, and in a way that even idiots will understand, I think."

Schera took out a small sickle from her waist and carefully etched on the wood. After several minutes, she stood the signboard ostentatiously in front of the field.

[Field of Schera's Cavalry. Damage it and I will kill you.
Colonel Schera Zade]

"—-How is it I wonder?"

Schera turned around to the soldiers while putting away the sickle. She took the opportunity to viciously smile and murderously glare at the military policemen. Their faces paled, and terrified, they dashed away like escaping rabbits.

“I think it is great! Very much like the Colonel. It is super easy to understand, and yeah, truly fine.”

“Certainly. There won’t be any idiots who’ll meddle with it. Whether it be bugs, birds, or sticky-fingered, evil military policemen, they’ll restrain themselves for sure I think.”

Said the man, laughing as he looked back at the place where the military policemen were.

After the men busily cleaned up, saluted, and left, Schera sat down in front of the field.
The sun set, and not losing interest, Schera earnestly continued to gaze there at the earth’s surface, until Katarina would come to call her.

Chapter 26: The Royal Capital's Confectionery is Too Delicious!

Schera's Cavalry of 3,000 that had departed from Cyrus Fortress were maintaining their spirits in the City of Canaan for the decisive battle that was expected to arrive. Orders hadn't been given yet, but a rumor had been spreading throughout the entire army that troops were gradually being dispatched to recapture Belta.
No matter how thick-headed the person, if they witnessed the 50,000 elite troops being dispatched from the Royal Capital and supplies being further stockpiled, they would probably figure it out even if they didn't want to. All the more because Barbora, the commandant of the First Army, was declaring the destruction of the rebel army more than usual.

While the entire First Army Corps was all in a hurry, Schera had been summoned by Yalder, and she boredly headed towards the castle.
Today, she wasn't wearing the black armor that she habitually wore, but a tailored uniform reserved for high-ranking officers of the Kingdom's Army. On her white keynote military uniform, all the medals she had been conferred thus far were boastfully attached.
Schera had complained that there was no need, but Katarina had forcefully persuaded her, saying that "formalities were important," so she had begrudgingly put on the stupid medals.
The castle guards that passed her, after being fixated by her vast numbers of medals and insignia of rank, hastily saluted… with cold sweat dripping down their backs.
A short, female officer. Medals, proof of magnificent military achievements. And with an insignia of Colonel rank, there was no doubt. This was the rumored god of death who even village children knew about.
The number of enemy generals that she had killed were countless. She was a monster who could slay thousands alone. The cavalry under her banner were all stalwart men who didn't fear death. Disrespect her and be perpetually haunted, etc., etc.
The rumors were embellished, and she was feared as a symbol of awe and terror by the noncommissioned officers.
Expressionless, she gave the men with stiff smiles a glance and headed for Yalder's room.
Before long, she stood in front of her destination's door. She slightly tidied her wrinkleless uniform, firmly knocked, and announced her arrival in a carrying voice.

"This is Schera. Please excuse me."

"Enter," was the only thing said from inside. It was the voice of that staff officer who was skilled in giving long lectures.

While thinking the voice somehow nostalgic, Schera quickly entered the room. There was General Yalder with an upbeat smile, and Staff Officer Sidamo with a frown.

"It's been awhile, Colonel Schera. I have heard of your exploits. To have caught up to me so quickly, my god you're an ominous woman."

Sidamo's official rank was Colonel, and merely a year after Belta had fallen, Schera

had caught up to Sidamo.

“Sir, thank you very much. Your words are encouraging. From hereon as well, I will do my best, I regret to say.”

“Put more emotion into your speech. Also, that’s not how you use the words, ‘I regret to say.’ Use your head a bit more.”

“Sir. Please excuse me.”

‘He’s going to start lecturing again?’, Schera had thought and furrowed her brows, but she would be troubled if it got even longer, so she immediately apologized.

“There’s this constant sense of discomfort when you speak formally because your speech doesn’t coincide with your expression. As an officer, you must have an appropriate attitude and a conscious conduct. All the more so because you’re a Colonel now.”

“Please forgive me, I will be careful from now on-!”

She said in a loud voice, but it was apparent that she was childishly incompliant. Now able to read Schera’s feelings better than before, Sidamo deeply sighed.
What this woman before him was thinking right now was simple. —-‘This is boring. I’m tired. Hungry.’
Sidamo pinched the wrinkles between his eyebrows and was about to let out a torrent of criticisms, but Yalder interrupted him while laughing.

“Hahaha-, oh come now. It’s so very like her, and I think it’s great. It’s fine to let that disrespectful attitude go on. If anything happens, I’ll take responsibility!”

“Thank you very much, Your Excellency!”

“Your Excellency, you cannot be soft on her. We might even hear slander towards Your Excellency from this imbecile.”

“I don’t really mind. The Colonel’s activities more than compensate for this trifle of a fault. Also, we didn’t call the Colonel here today to teach her respect. Got it? Staff Officer Sidamo.”

“Sir-.”

Yalder tapped his desk with a finger a couple times, and Sidamo produced two packages from deeper in the room. He put these slowly in front of Schera on the table, and returned to beside his boss.

“Colonel, the left package was sent from His Majesty to you. Open it.”

“—-Sir-! Excuse me!”

Urged by Yalder, Schera began opening the small package that was on her left. ‘I hope it’s delicious food,’ she expectantly thought.
Carefully and gently opening the package, what jumped into Schera’s vision, was an even gaudier, shiny, gold, fat medal than the ones already on her. Schera didn’t hide her crushed, disappointed expression, and she silently put the lid back on the box,

closing it.

“Colonel Schera, do you have something to complain about? As surprising as it sounds, it’s a medal awarded by His Majesty the King. How about looking happier?”

“I have no complaints whatsoever. This is too great an honor.”

Her words didn’t match her demeanor. A feeling of gloominess oozed from her body.

“In that case, hurry up and try putting on the medal. If you parade around the town wearing that Star of the Patriot Knight, everyone will acknowledge your greatness. It’s a marvelous medal suitable for a hero. This is honestly a special occasion.”

The people’s evaluation of Schera probably wouldn’t change much upon her medals increasing even further. No matter how numerous her medals became, she didn’t have that special something.
Schera put the small box gently into the vegetable pouch at her waist and decided she saw nothing. The vegetables had all been eaten, so now it was just an empty pouch with the smell stuck to it.

“……”

“Cheer up, Colonel Schera. Sidamo, you have a terrible personality. When did that happen to you?”

Yalder asked with a sarcastic smile, and Sidamo plainly replied,

“Ever since working under Your Excellency, I became like this all of a sudden.”

“That so, that so. Well my bad for troubling you. Go polish up that mean personality some more. I don’t need a goody two-shoes staff officer after all. I expect you to do it, Staff Officer Sidamo.”

“Thank you very much, Your Excellency.”

“Umu. Well then, Colonel. Try opening the next box. The thing you desire should be in there. I specifically called an artisan from the Royal Capital to make it. It’s my personal, custom order.”

“—-Sir-!”

Schera opened the big box on the center of the table. Inside, was an absolutely delicious-looking confectionary, decorated with generous amounts of multicolored fruits. The instant she took off the cover, sweet and sour smells tickled Schera’s nose and accentuated her hunger. Crusted in melted sugar, this round confectionary let off an enticing glitter; its appearance made one want to gobble it up immediately.
It looked like someone almost haphazardly dumped many species and many varieties of fruit on a pie base. Yalder’s custom order pie had a strange look to it, but the satisfaction it would give was unmatched.
Schera gingerly poked it with her finger, and then licked the syrup stuck to her hand. It was sweet and extremely delicious. It couldn’t be expressed in words. She couldn’t hold back any longer; she grabbed the “Yalder Pie” with an eagle grip, when,

“—-Colonel Schera. Do you know where you are?”

"ah……"

Schera froze with her hand inside the box. Sidamo repeated his question.

"Colonel. I'm asking you, do you know where you are?"

"……Excuse my discourtesy."

Crestfallen, Schera withdrew her hand. Seeing her despondency, Yalder desperately held back his laughter.
He felt like he was at another place, watching two disobedient siblings arguing.

"Good. Now close the lid, and convey the correct words you ought to say to His Excellency. Now."

Schera held the lid aloft as told, and … with a never before seen sluggishness, she closed the box.
Then, in an all too apparent sullen manner, she turned to Yalder and saluted.

"……Thank you very much. Your Excellency."

"Umu. You should enjoy it later. I don't really mind, but there's a noisy-mouthed Sir Staff Officer right next to us. Sorry, but be patient for now."

"It's upsetting to be called noisy. You cannot be soft on her. This imbecile is a woman who would likely even eat in the middle of a war council. This is a good chance, so we have to firmly train her here."

Schera was about to say that she did eat during war council in Belta, but she stopped herself. Since she felt like the sweets would go even farther away. While pacifying Sidamo who started ranting, Yalder turned back to Schera.

"Colonel, our business is concluded. Probably soon, the orders to depart will come. I'm not exaggerating when I say the next battle will decide the fate of the Kingdom. Give everything you have. Of course, we will also fight to the death. I expect much more greatness from you."

"Sir, please leave it to me! I will absolutely massacre the rebel army!"

"Very well. In the event of our victory, I will invite you to my estate in the Royal Capital. I've hired many skilled chefs, so you'll surely be satisfied."

"Thank you very much, Your Excellency!"

Schera had actually not even once entered the Royal Capital. No matter what, she had to win the battle–she wanted to get delicious treats.
These were chefs employed by a high ranking general. No doubt, there would be some foods she had never seen before. Just imagining them made her mouth water.

"…….Save imaging the luxurious food for after we win, Colonel. Before you drool, put preparations for the battle in order first."

"Understood-!"

Schera cheerfully responded to the exasperated Sidamo, preciously hugged the box with the confectionary in it, and left in hasty steps. She planned on eating it immediately after returning to her room. This was a matter of utmost precedence. Yalder saw her off with a fond expression. Sidamo lightly cleared his throat, and he addressed Yalder.

"Your Excellency. Actually, there is a formal matter of such gravity which I must discuss with you."

"What, standing on ceremony all of a sudden. Don't tell me, you've fallen in love with Schera and want to establish a formal marriage interview!? Sorry, but it won't work out. I must have Colonel Schera marry into my Gael family. Sorry, but restrain yourself for me."

Said Yalder in a tone that didn't make one think he was joking, and Sidamo scowled at him with an expression as if to say, "What nonsense are you spouting?"
He cleared his throat louder than before, and continued talking with a displeased demeanor.

"That is an unnecessary worry. I wouldn't, come hell or high water."

"I see, I see! That's a relief then. …….So, what is it?"

"Sir, actually, I have obtained a strange piece of intelligence from those that have returned from the north. The members of the rebel army have provisioned a large quantity of Cologne cows from the northern region."

Said Sidamo, and Yalder rubbed his jaw, intrigued.

"Speaking of Cologne cows, they're a famous livestock known for their delicious taste. But they have one more peculiar trait…"

"Yes. Those cattle have a brutal and ferocious personality, and if they were somehow so inclined, their disposition would make them endlessly run towards a target. If a large quantity of them were thrown onto the battlefield……"

"So that's the case. That would be somewhat troublesome. Soldiers who knew nothing would probably be thrown into chaos if they were attacked suddenly by a relentless herd. ……Very well, tell Barbora for me that I want him to make it common knowledge amongst the soldiers beforehand. He might not like it, but that's preferable to losing. If he says no, I will arrange for it."

"Thank you very much, Your Excellency. ……Also, about that used at the Alucia Engagement—-"

"……Ahh, the sorcery mines right? I know without you telling me. Even now, I still have bad dreams about that defeat. If only my character had just been a bit more prudent. I can't express how much regret I feel."

Yalder's gaze dropped, and Sidamo was a little worried, but Yalder bitterly smiled, saying his worry wasn't needed.

"……Your Excellency."

" ……We have to warn them about that too. We cannot repeat the same mistake. Send out droves of scouts and have them constantly observe the plains. We won't fall into that rut again-!"

Agitated, Yalder hit his desk. Sidamo deeply lowered his head and departed from the room.
He had taken measures for the situations he could think of. He had devised a counter-plan for the sorcery mines, and had advised caution against the schemed Cologne cows.
But, he had a bad feeling. Like he had overlooked something. That kind of unease scrambled through Sidamo's mind.

"……I should consolidate my thoughts one more time. There isn't much time until departure for the front, but we must have perfect preparations. We cannot permit anymore defeats."

Next week, Barbora, the Army Corps Commander of the First Army, gave his orders to all the soldiers gathered in Canaan.
"Take back Belta, and destroy the rebel army in its entirety," he triumphantly and loudly said. Leaving behind 20,000 guards for Canaan and Roshanak, a large army consisting of all 150,000 departed for Belta.

The Supreme Commander of the Kingdom's Army was General Barbora. Yalder's United Legion was incorporated into the First Army, and Yalder was placed under the command of Barbora, who was younger than him.
Yalder had once been an Army Corps Commander himself, but victory of all things was more important than his own useless pride, so he obediently followed. That sounded splendid when it came out of his mouth, but his face was flushed, and a blood vessel was furiously bulging out, said Sidamo waiting next to him.
Leading the other divisions were Octavio and Borbon, Barbora's confided generals. There was also Major General Larus who had displayed solid talent under Sharov. Favoring discretion, Larus had opposed the dispatch this time until the end. The words the passed-away Sharov had left Larus were to "never move from Canaan. Thoroughly fortify the defenses and wait for the enemy to destroy themselves." Aggressively assertive for quite awhile, Barbora had rejected that policy and endlessly stated his own cherished opinion at the war council.
Now that they had won the war against the Empire, taking back Belta was the same as deciding the war. If they didn't make an offensive here, then just when would they?
That opinion was supported by the staff officers and generals, but even so, Larus showed his disapproval, and in the end, he was silenced by a royal edict.

Yalder had not given his own opinion and followed the war council's plan. Even if they defended and followed Sharov's advice, it was hard to think their prospects would change for the better. But making a large offensive to take back Belta carried with it the risk of not being able to recover if they lost.
If they won, fine. But, if they lost, it was all over. If Canaan fell, the Liberation Army

would gradually get their hands on the Royal Capital. In that case, the feudal lords who decided to wait and see would unanimously turn towards the rebel army.

"……This is the only battle we absolutely cannot lose. We will win no matter what. I, Yalder Gael, will wager my life, and wipe out my disgrace from before-!"

Yalder steeled his resolve, and strongly gripped the flag of the Third Army, blotted by mud and blood. He would once again obtain the glory of victory, and this flag would flutter for his now deceased subordinates. This was a duty he ought to carry out, for shamelessly living on as a defeated general, Yalder thought.

Mid-march, a grim-faced man approached next to Schera. Schera disinterestedly turned her head, and inclined her head quizzically, since she remembered that face from somewhere.

"……Who were you again, I wonder? I feel like I remember you from somewhere."

"Congratulations on your promotion, Colonel Schera."

The man casually handed over a small bag to Schera. When she took it and checked inside, the bag was full of roasted beans.
These were the strange tasting beans that were Belta's specialty. Schera's memories began steadily clearing.

"Ahh, I remember. You, you're Major Konrad that was at Belta right? So your wounds have healed. I thought that they were serious enough that you couldn't move now though."

"Yes, Colonel Schera. Thanks to the Colonel's hard fight, this life was saved. In this battle, to repay that debt, I intend to work with the resolve to work my body to the bone-!"

Konrad spoke in bits and pieces as if checking each and every phrase.

"……Respectful language almost deathly doesn't suit you. Can you speak like you always do without pushing yourself?"

With a self-satisfied face, she said words that had been said to her once before.
Konrad shook his head side to side, saying he couldn't abide by Schera's advice.

"Rank is absolute in an army. Please excuse me, but, I cannot do that!"

"I see. Doesn't really matter to me. Well, you were finally saved, so don't overexert yourself. This time, you'll probably die. That's just my intuition though."

Konrad was blatantly informed of his death, but he responded to Schera without a change in expression.
If he was afraid of death, he wouldn't have brushed away the doctor restraining him and participated in this battle.
Konrad had something he had to carry out, even at the cost of his life.

"In this battle, I have to kill the enemies of His Excellency, David. If I can accomplish that, this petty life is worth it."

His once superior officer David had died at Belta. He was a noble who valued him despite his poor socializing skills. David's reputation among others was unfavorable, but for Konrad, David was a man who he owed a debt of gratitude.
He himself would clear up David's regret without fail. With just that tenacity, Konrad had made a recovery from wounds so serious he couldn't move.

"……I see. I can't stop you then. I expect great things from you this battle. For the Kingdom's victory, let us expend all our power, together."

"Sir, understood-!"

The conversation between both of them, both unsuited towards respectful language, ended shortly.
Konrad once again saluted atop his horse, and he returned to his own unit. Schera expressionlessly saw him off, took out a bean from the pouch, and threw it into her mouth.

"……Spicy."

The seasoning on today's beans were so spicy that even Schera grimaced.

The Liberation Army received news that 'the Kingdom's Army of 150,000 are in the middle of marching towards Belta.' As they had obtained intelligence that forces were gathering in Canaan beforehand, their war preparations were already complete.
It was the same for the Liberation Army too–they couldn't lose this battle. Now that the Empire couldn't take action, they had to let the world know that the Liberation Army could take control of the Royal Capital by itself. For that sake, they also had to achieve victory no matter what.
The commander of the Liberation Army, Altura, gave her orders to her gathered Liberation Army comrades.

"This battle will decide the fate of the Liberation War. Even now while we're doing this, innocent people are starving and suffering. We are not permitted to fail. We must overthrow the current monarchy, spreading its harsh tyranny, no matter the costs. For that sake, much blood may be spilled, and many comrades may lose their lives. I will carry all those sins, and then, we will undoubtedly kill Kristoff, the source of this misgovernment, this, I swear to you. To build a world where no one has to suffer, where everyone can live in smiles, please, I want you to lend me your strength-!!"

Altura unsheathed her sword and majestically raised it towards the heavens. Cheers rang out like an explosion, and shouts of 'Long Live the Liberation Army' roared. Gazing at them with a triumphant expression, Altura lived up to everyone's cheers.

The soldiers of the Liberation Army were not fools. They didn't think they could live in complete harmony like the Princess described. But even so, it was hard to put into

form their hatred and resentment towards the current Kingdom tormenting them. That outlet for their seething rage that turned it into a just cause: that was Altura and the Liberation Army.

General Behrouz received the signal from Altura, and with a roar unbefitting his age, he gave his orders to the lined up army.

“WE WILL WIN THIS BATTLE, AND TAKE BACK OUR ABUNDANT LIVELIHOODS IN THE KINGDOM-! FOR THAT, WE MUST MAKE CANAAN FALL NO MATTER WHAT-! FIGHT UNTIL YOU DIE! JUSTICE IS ON OUR SIDE-! BEGIN THE MARCH-!!”

“BEGIN THE MARCH-! TARGET, BERTUSBURG PLAINS!”

The Liberation Army, totalling 130,000, departed from Belta to intercept the advancing Army of the Kingdom. They planned to annihilate the approaching enemy army, and instantly take Canaan lacking in men. If this went well, they could probably put an end to this war.
Both armies would crash in Bertusburg Plains spread between Belta and Canaan. The largest forces of the Kingdom’s Army and the Liberation Army would clash in this battle. The plains had good visibility and gentle-sloping terrain. Characteristically, there was a high ground called Carnas Plateau, and it rose up, looking down in every direction.
Diener, Tactician of the Liberation Army, had successfully deployed a formation quickly on that high ground. They built a quick encampment on it, and a division led by Ghamzeh was deployed for its defense. Ghamzeh was also a general who burned with the desire for revenge. He had quit his post as staff officer and now led an army unit.
Also, 2,000 Cologne cows provisioned by Vander from the north were firmly bound, covered, and stationed at the rear of the army. Half of them were attached to wagons with their canopies covered.

—-In these carts were stacked a certain something,

On the other hand, the Kingdom’s Army also spread out their forces and confronted the rebel army from the front. Having the advantage in numbers, the Kingdom’s Army roughly planned to take the momentum and suppress them with a frontal attack.
At the same time, an operation was worked out to take back the threat of Carnas Plateau.
Barbora and the main body of the army was the center wing. The left wing was Borbon’s division, and the right wing was Yalder’s Legion placed in the back. Schera’s Cavalry was entrusted with the role of advance guard for the center wing.
There would inevitably become the foremost front line and see the fiercest battle. Casualties would naturally be high, but there was also the honored duty of starting the battle.
Schera’s entrusted role was to drive a wedge between the enemy’s center and left wing. Highly valuing Schera’s prowess, Barbora had given Schera this important duty and had stifled his confident Octavio’s opposition.
Assigned as her support was Major Konrad formerly of the Fourth Army, who recently had recovered from his wounds, and Octavio, who had opposed until the end.

Barbora's main body and Borbon's division would be a decoy to stalemate the front, and the main duty lay with the right wing led by Yalder. Desiring experience and valor, Barbora had ventured to select Yalder who he had an dog-cat relationship with for this duty. Now that his desire for promotion had been satiated, he intended to do everything he could for victory. He also had reason to harbor doubts about the leadership ability of his confidant Octavio and the others.

After they divided and isolated Carnas Plateau, Yalder's right wing would circle around, aim for the side thin in defenses, and annihilate them, which would bring the operation to its final stage. After gaining control of the high ground, they would use that momentum and descend on the enemy headquarters. This was Barbora's drafted operation.

"Your Excellency Barbora! Why did you let General Yalder command the detached right wing-!? Not only that, I cannot believe you left the role of the wedge to that little girl! Please entrust such an important role to the senior generals of our First Army!"

Knowing the details of the operation, Octavio appealed to Barbora while sending spit flying. Why was Yalder entrusted with the detached right wing that seemed to have the most reward? Above all, he couldn't accept that he, of such long service, was to be the rear guard of a little girl who recently became a Colonel.
If this operation went all, Schera would have the achievement of successfully dividing the enemy, and would be promoted to Major General, the same rank as Octavio, despite her humble birth. He couldn't even laugh. Just imagining it made him dizzy.

"Octavio. We must win this battle no matter what. Colonel Schera's almost terrifying prowess is known not only by our allies but also the enemy. I have deemed that she is the most suitable for the role of cutting in and breaking apart the enemy line; and, that you are the most suitable to back her up."

Barbora level-headedly declared. Octavio persisted, but Barbora took no notice of him.

"Your Excellency!!"

"You're annoying-! This is a decided matter! We cannot make changes now! You should obediently follow my orders-!"

"—-…. B, by your will."

Barbora scolded, and Octavio was unwillingly cowed. Normally, he was very daring, but in crucial moments, he had a timid side to him, which Barbora had seen through. Octavio left the pavilion, and took along his adjutant who was waiting outside for him back to his own camp.
Barbora rubbed his temples. He now finally realized Sharov's troubles. He had been able to complain as much as he wanted precisely because Sharov was there to complain to. Now that Barbora was burdened with the lives of the entire First Army, he wasn't allowed such behavior.

"……shit-."

"Sir Octavio. Are you fine with this?"

The adjutant who had been listening asked Octavio whose face was red. 'Was it really fine having the role of a little girl's rear guard?', he reminded. Octavio's promotion went hand in hand with his.

"Hmph. War, is something that once started, judgement on-scene takes priority. Commanders who adapt themselves to the situation are who we need to be our generals. Besides, that Colonel Schera will sadly overextend, too hasty for merit, is another situation we can consider. If that happens, then there will be nothing we can do."

"……I understand. It cannot be helped if that happens. It is a common story where someone dies in battle, too impatient to distinguish themselves and too lustful for promotion."

The adjutant had a seedy smile. Octavio continued further.

"In fact, it might be better to abandon that little girl, and when the enemy is negligent, we cut into them. Kukuh-, if she has as much prowess as the rumors say, she'll probably survive. There's absolutely no need for us to support. I'll win this battle, and the nuisances will disappear."

It goes without saying that Schera, who had been promoted with frightening speed, was included in those nuisances.
The nail that sticks out gets hammered down. He had to quickly deal with this dangerous sprout that was likely to threaten his position, and he would nip it in the bud.
It was these kinds of pointless political disputes that had been corroding the Kingdom's Army, but the persons themselves didn't care at all.

Leading her cavalry and standing on the front lines, Schera took out a package she had fastened to her horse and devoured the final slice of the Yalder Pie.
Mixes of fruit juices gushed in her mouth, and Schera had a beaming, happy smile. To be able to enjoy the tastes of so many fruits in just one pie–perhaps Yalder who had thought of this was a genius.
Schera's impression of Yalder improved.
The surrounding soldiers were watching her affectionately. There was an alluring, "gap" feeling about Death who everyone feared stuffing her cheeks with sweets like a plain village girl.

"Colonel, you saved His Excellency Yalder's present for this day? I thought you had ate it all. You had seemed much captivated by it."

Enquired Katarina, and Schera shook her head up and down while slowly chewing.

“Today is a special day. I’ll be able to kill tons of the rebel scum to my heart’s content. That’s why, you know, I thought to eat something good before the important battle.”

Schera had prepared the tastiest food she could, and that was this Yalder Pie.
If she could go to the Royal Capital, she intended on using all the money she had and going on a shopping spree.
Yalder’s feast, this delicious treat, she thought about going to the Royal Capital right now immediately, but she held back.
Eating was important, but dealing with these scum was just as paramount.

“So that is the case; I understand now.”

“Actually, I wanted to share some with you, but I ate all of it and there’s nothing left. Sorry. If we go to the Royal Capital, I’ll buy you all your share. Look forward to it.”

“Not at all! Your feelings are enough for me.”

Katarina courteously declined. To be honest, she didn’t like sweet things that much.
‘Oh?’, said Schera. She licked her fingertips and stretched.

“……Ahh, dogs of the rebel army as far as the eye can see. Annoying trash in swarms. Infestation to the extreme. Don’t you think so, Katarina?”

The vexatious forces of the rebel army were spread out far in front of them, and their green flag that made her irritated just by looking at it was fluttering.
Genuinely displeased, Schera narrowed her eyes and grimaced. Her happy feelings instantly changed to something darkish.
When Katarina handed her a hard candy, she threw it into her mouth without saying anything and pulverized it savagely.
Thick killing intent began radiating from her small body, and her expression changed to something feral.

“—-Your orders, Colonel Schera.”

“Kill everything within reach. Don’t overlook a single rebel army scum. Kill all of them, whether they be civilian soldiers or young soldiers. No buts, kill them.”

“Slaughter the rebel army-! The Colonel’s orders are absolute, you must carry them out-!! If you understand, let’s hear the Colonel’s orders-!”

Katarina raised her voice, and all the cavalrymen lifted their spears and yelled,

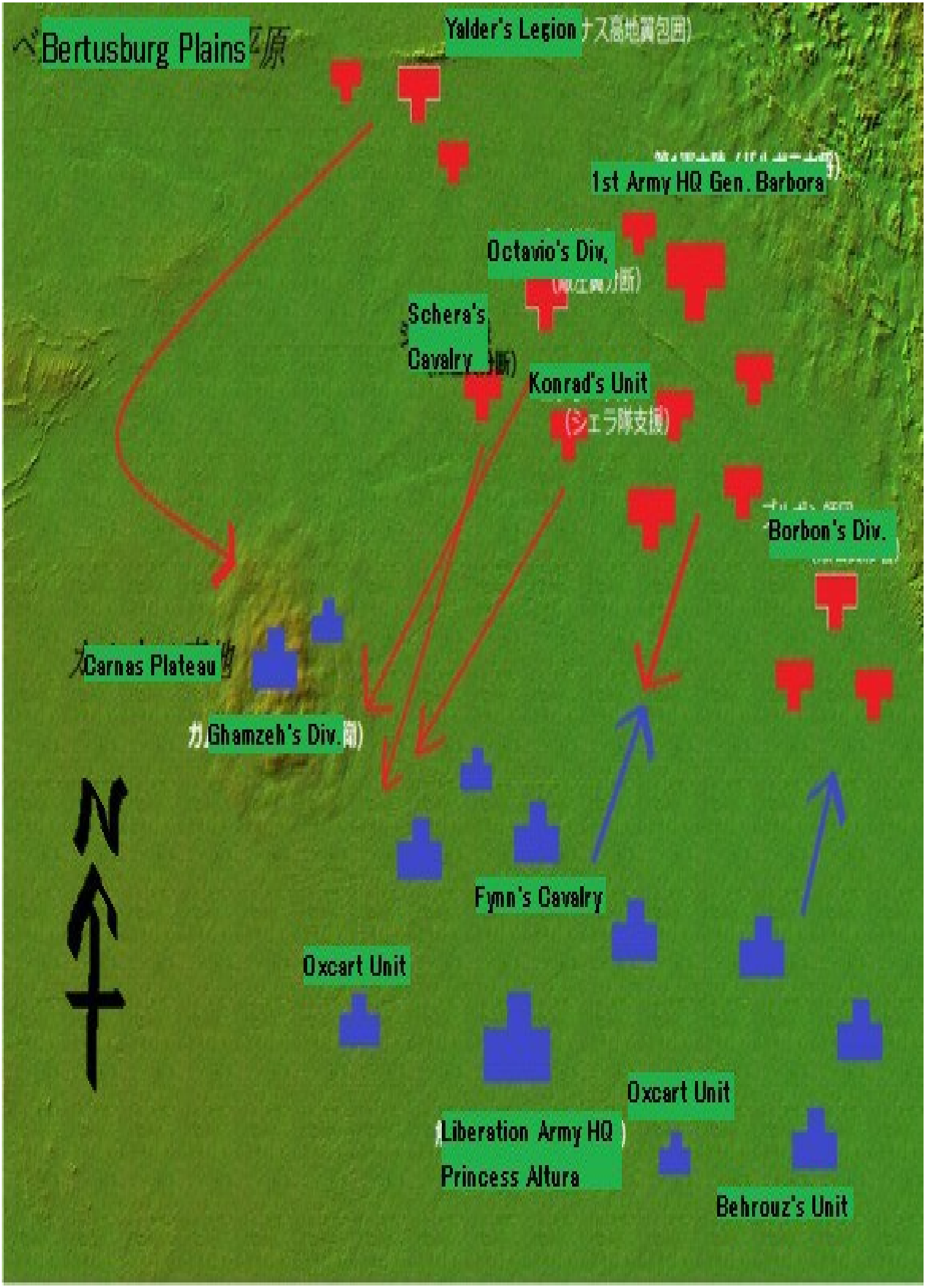
“DEATH TO THE REBEL ARMY-! VICTORY TO THE COLONEL-!!”
“DEATH TO THE REBEL SCUM! VICTORY TO SCHERA’S CAVALRY-!!”
“VICTORY FOR COLONEL SCHERA-!! HAIL COLONEL SCHERA-!!”

They shouted praise towards Schera, not loyalty towards the Kingdom. Soldiers not of Schera’s Cavalry were petrified and overwhelmed by their spirit.
Schera smiled contentedly at her cavalry, then glanced at the flock of prey spread out before her, and deliciously licked her lips.

“Well then, let us conquer.”

Schera easily rotated her scythe above her head and began galloping with all her energy, taking the lead. Her cavalry hoisting their black flags, a step behind, followed after her, kicking up a furious cloud of dust.

—-The Battle of Bertusburg, the fight to decide the fate of the Kingdom’s Army and the Liberation Army, began.


Bertusburg Plains
Yalder's Legion
1st Army HQ Gen. Barbora
Octavio's Div.
Schera's
Cavalry
Konrad's Unit
Borbon's Div.
Carnas Plateau
Ghamzeh's Div.
N
Fynn's Cavalry
Oxcart Unit
Oxcart Unit
Liberation Army HQ
Princess Altura
Behrouz's Unit

Chapter 27: I Won't Eat This Meat

Three hours after the battle began.
The Kingdom's Army couldn't contain themselves and moved first. The Liberation Army followed suit, and the center advance guards of both armies collided in the middle of the plains.
In the skirmish between these two vanguards were Fynn of the Liberation Army displaying his spearmanship and Schera with her scythe.
Together with archer support, they both resolutely attacked the line of battle drawn by the infantry and grievously overran them.

The Adjutant Milla came to advise Fynn, who swung his spear even while doused by blood.

"Colonel-! Major Carnac's unit is being attacked by enemy cavalry-! They're likely to be annihilated at this rate-!"

Milla pointed behind her. The line of battle was in a sorry state, and cavalry carrying black flags were crushing the infantry with the force of a tsunami.
Carnac was shouting, trying to somehow rally the troops, but he had no effect on the infantry being pushed back. They would be routed eventually if this were to continue.
The main bodies of both armies had not yet moved, so this loss would not be a fatal blow probably, but the tides would turn in favor of their adversaries. They must protect Carnac's unit.
Fynn sweeped off the head of a Kingdom soldier, and immediately gave his judgement.

"The Lion's Cavalry will change course and cover Carnac's unit in the back-! Milla, I leave the rear guard to you!"

"Please leave it to me Colonel-! A hundred riders follow me-! Lure the enemy!"

"OU-!!"

"The rest follow me-! We will take Death's head this time for sure!! We will honor our comrades who died on the road here!!"

"UOOOOOOOOOOOOO–!!"

The cavalry raised their voices, responding to Fynn's encouragement. The morale of this unit comprised of elite soldiers was the highest in the Liberation Army.
A hundred riders followed Milla, and they began to ride to attract enemy soldiers. Not wasting the opportunity, the main body of Fynn's unit began heading to Carnac's unit in the back. Konrad's unit of the Kingdom's Army went to obstruct them, but the cavalry's momentum would not come to a halt. They couldn't let Schera's back be attacked like this, and Konrad's unit pursued with raging spirit.

Carnac's Unit.
He had been granted 5,000 infantry, but their casualties had already exceeded 1,000. More than half of his remaining soldiers had wounds of some kind. Though they weren't homogenous in their birthplaces, his soldiers had high morale, and shouldn't

have by any means been defeated by the Kingdom's Army.
But, that was exactly the disaster occurring before his eyes. The line of battle they had frantically trained for had completely collapsed. Red blood flowed all over the earth, and evil demons were squeezing the last drop of life from the soldiers on the brink of death who couldn't move.

"M, Major. Let us escape! We are no match for Death-!! Give the permission to retreat!!"

An adjutant with a sobbing face approached, but Carnac gripped him by the collar and shouted at him.

"You fool-!! This battle decides the outcome of the Liberation War-!! Do you think that our vanguard in front of all the others could retreat!!?"

"H, however-!"

"Shut it, Death God though she may be, she's human like us!! She's nothing but an embellished and spread rumor-!! And take a look, Colonel Fynn's cavalry is heading our way!! We just have to hold out a bit longer! Then we can launch a pincer attack!!"

At Carnac's words, the Adjutant focused far in front of them. Certainly, there was a party with the Lion's Flag galloping towards them.
But, he didn't think they could hold out until they would arrive. Because:

"Ma, Major, we've been surrounded-!!"

"Endure-!! Take a square formation-!! Line the spears and don't let them cut into us-!! Remember your daily training-! Show the enemy no weakness-!!"

Carnac haphazardly wiped his streaming sweat and grasped tightly his personal weapon, a trident.

After the line of battle had been broken, Schera's Cavalry raced in a circle and broke into Carnac's unit from all around them. While constantly moving, never stopping in their movements, they continued to create fountains of blood. Stationary cavalry was fragile. As Schera understood that through instinct, she strictly ordered her soldiers to never stop moving. To supplement that, Katarina was preventing Liberation Army soldiers from reinforcing Carnac's unit.
The black flag with a white crow coat of arms was already well-known among the Liberation Army. A tragedy of slaughter was playing out while Death's flag fluttered. There was no one who would willingly jump to their deaths. They tried their hardest to fire arrows from a medium range.

"…….About time I wonder."

"Sir-, I think this is sufficient-."

"Alright, smash the enemy's formation-!! Everyone follow me-!!"

"OU-!!"

Schera's Cavalry that was trampling them with circular movements nimbly took an arrow-like formation under her orders. Their completely disciplined movements would not lose to even the most seasoned of soldiers. This taut, rippling arrow was mercilessly fired at the hiding spot of their pitiful prey.

"S, stay back. D, Death is-"
"N, no, I don't want to die."
"M, mom, why, what have I done to deserve this."

The hands of the soldiers holding their spears trembled, and their faces paled. It was outrageous; what possibility was there to stop Death. But even so, they had to fight. A Platoon Leader person tried to rouse them, stimulate them, and encourage them.

"Save your complaints for later-; set the spears-! They're coming-!!"

A juvenile-faced female could be seen at the forefront. Wielding a scythe dripping with fresh blood and a joyful smile on her face, she swooped down on them. Her black armor was already smeared with red fluid. A young soldier who made eye contact felt his knees give way, and he soiled himself.

"H, hih, ca, I can't-. M, Mo, Monster-!"

"—-Pikes-!! Forward-!!"

The Platoon Leader gave his order, and the pikes were sent out. Their tips were easily cut apart, and the large scythe split the bodies of several men on the return swing. The cursed cavalry instantly surged into that opening.
Soldiers whose strength left their legs were trampled by scores of horses and became pitiful corpses. The head of the Platoon Leader was sent flying by Katarina's sword.
A few riders of Schera's Cavalry were impaled by spears, but they paid no attention to them and continued to run as they were.
Raising mad laughter, they continued to kill soldiers, brandishing their spears, and then they suddenly toppled, like dolls whose strings had been cut. Or rather, it would be more appropriate to say they had used up all their lifeforce.
They followed Schera's orders to trample and slaughter until their final moments. They died with extremely satisfied expressions.

The robust square formation was crushed in one breath, and the demented blade gradually approached Carnac. His adjutant had already died in battle. That was a stroke of luck probably. He had died before confronting the monster before them. Definitely, that was a fortunate matter. At least, more fortunate than him.
Carnac lowered his hips so his gaze wouldn't meet Schera's atop her horse. His target was the horse. He would stab the horse, and kill Death when its posture was in disarray. He could see himself winning on equal footing. The horse must fall first.

"—-Major of the Liberation Army, Carnac. Here I come-!!"

"A dog shouldn't bark so proudly. I don't care about a trash's name-!!"

Schera spurred on her horse and approached Carnac. Her scythe was held out horizontally, and she planned on splitting his torso with one blow.
Carnac postured straight in front of her. He concentrated all his nerves on this one

attack.

"—-Got it-!!"

"——!"

Carnac's trident sailed true, and it pierced the throat of Schera's horse. Carnac was showered in its blood.
As Schera's balance was broken, she couldn't swing her scythe.
Carnac extracted his trident and waited for the moment the horse collapsed. Once it fell, he would kill Death. So he waited. Waited.

And he waited.

"—-Why… why won't it fall?"

"……."

"Why won't it die-!! Is even your horse immortal-!??"

"Who knows why, I wonder."

Dumbfounded, Carnac studied the horse. He was sure his trident had torn the horse's throat. Yet, why wasn't this horse dead.
Why wouldn't it fall. He couldn't kill Death if it didn't fall.
In the horse's empty eyes, the agitated figure of Carnac was reflected. That moment, he thought he saw it smile. Like it was scoffing at the few seconds he had left to live. No, the horse was certainly laughing. The horse of a monster, was after all, a monster.

"Y, you monsters-!! What the heck are you all-!!"

Fallen into a state of panic, Carnac again lunged with his spear.

"Didn't you guys give me the name? 'Death.' So that's what I am. Farewell, then."

"—-ah"

Carnac and even his trident was cut apart by her large scythe. His body split into two, and his organs splattered onto the ground.
With blood dripping from its throat, Death's horse crushed underfoot Carnac's skull with all its weight. Like smashing a fruit, brain matter scattered.

"…….Satisfied?"

Schera tenderly brushed her horse's mane, and it lightly neighed, showing its agreement.

"Colonel-! Enemy cavalry are approaching from the rear!! They have a lion emblem!"

"Today is just preliminary fighting I was told, so we'll fight them while heading back. ……Form ranks-! Schera's Cavalry is changing course!!"

"Understood-! All units move out-!!"

“BEGIN CHANGING COURSE-! FOLLOW THE COLONEL-!!”

From Carnac’s position, they again reformed the ranks, and Schera’s Cavalry began heading towards the center wing of the Kingdom’s Army. Fynn’s cavalry rushed into them, obstructing them. Behind Fynn raced Konrad to support Schera. They crossed, and it became a momentary battle with only one blow exchanged. They must not stop. A cavalry that stopped its movements lost its offensive ability and would become a target for archers.

At the head of both cavalries, Schera and Fynn were confronting each other while galloping.

“Death God-! I knew I should have killed you that time!! Just how many people will you kill until you’re satisfied-!!?”

“Until I kill all of you, I won’t die! I’ll kill you like that dog earlier!”

“Enemy of Carnac-, my name is Fynn, the Lion General Fynn!!”

“Oh how great for a dog-!! I don’t care about any of your names-!!”

Fynn’s spear and Schera’s scythe crossed. Soldiers of both cavalries collided while wielding their weapons. Many riders fell from their horses at this collision.
Riders died, their heads separated from their shoulders. Helmets were smashed, and soldiers fainted in agony holding their heads. There were people crushed under horses, and unable to move, their breathing ceased.
During all this, Schera and Fynn were swinging their weapons, unleashing intense blows trying to take their sworn enemy’s head. They never stopped moving, and their horses galloped while they exchanged many, many furious blows.

“HAAAAAAAA–!!”

“Die-!!!!”

Blood coming from her head, Schera’s frenzied attack was stopped in the nick of time, and Fynn sent out a sharp thrust of his own. Despite gritting his teeth at the weight of her blows, he was somehow standing firm. If Schera was the hero of the Kingdom’s Army, then Fynn was the hero of the Liberation Army. They could not have made it this far with only luck.
They exchanged many bouts, they exchanged many tens of bouts, but neither of them could inflict a fatal wound. Both Schera’s Cavalry and Fynn’s cavalry were holding their breaths while watching attentively. Their cavalries had already crossed each other, and normally, they should have stopped their duel and returned to their groups.
But currently, neither Schera nor Fynn could be stopped. Then, they could only watch and believe in their leader’s victory. In the center of the battlefield, the general skirmish still going on, a weird space was created where only these two riders crossed weapons. Konrad’s unit who came to back Schera, and a unit of the Liberation Army that had come to pursue Schera, couldn’t move.

“Hah-, hah-, Schera-! If you have this much skill, why are you supporting the rotten Kingdom-!??”

Asked Fynn in a tone with not a trace of his normal collectedness. If she had this

much ability, she should be able to distinguish herself even in the Liberation Army, no doubt. There was value in just trying to extend an invitation. Having actually crossed blades, Fynn thought so. This woman, was certainly strong.

"You guys are more rotten-!! The ones who stole my last bit of food, was you guys-!! I will never, never forgive you-!!"

Shouted Schera in a rage.

"Come to the Liberation Army-! You won't die futilely here! Let's overthrow the Kingdom together-! Princess Altura, will surely build a world, where no one will suffer-!"

"Shut up shut up shut up-! I'll make it so you can't spout that nonsense ever again-!! I'll kill you and Altura-!"

Mad, Schera unleashed an attack charged with all her power. It was an blow unleashed with her eyes bloodshot and her teeth clenched to their limits. It was Schera's greatest swing, loaded with all of her energy that would smash even the strongest impediment without any resistance. Her scythe howled in displeasure.
Of course even Fynn couldn't receive this blow, he judged, and he promptly threw himself off his horse to evade.
Fynn's horse in the wake of the scythe was cleaved in two, spasming while its viscera flew out of its torso, and it died.

Schera with her breathing ragged approached Fynn with his posture broken, to give him the finishing blow.

"This is the end. Regret that mouth that made fun of me. I'll cut you limb from limb."

"—-Kuh-!"

Having thrown his spear away, Fynn drew his sword while on the ground. He wouldn't be able to stop the next blow like this. He would be cut along with his sword. And he would die.
Fynn steeled himself, when,

"Save the Colonel-!! Repulse that Death God!!"

"Archers ready-!! Fire-!!"

Receiving Adjutant Milla's orders, the archers volleyed at Schera. Several fired arrows struck Schera's armor and her horse, hindering her before her final blow could reach her prey. Arrows were fired again. She didn't receive any fatal blows, but Schera couldn't go on the offensive.

"——, you trash get out of my way-!"

"Kill the Death God-!! Use any means necessary-!! Kill her here-!!"

"Another volley, fire-!! Aim for that thing's horse-!!"

Schera spun her scythe to brush away the drizzling arrows. Seeing that opening, Fynn

corrected his posture and ran towards his own soldiers. Schera clicked her tongue, and returned to beside Katarina and the others while knocking down arrows.
She could have killed that man with one more blow. But, he was lucky until the very, very end.
And, her luck was bad. That's all it was.

"Are you unhurt, Colonel! Damn it, to intrude upon a one on one fight-!"

Katarina and the others had restrained themselves from interfering in the commander's one on one fight in fear of incurring Schera's displeasure. She deeply regretted her mistaken decision.

"Yeah. When I thought about a duel, I got too heated, and lost. This isn't a match, but a battlefield. There is no cowardice or cheating. Next time, don't hold back you guys. Kill them all."

"Sir, understood-!"

Horns resounded, calling them back. From both armies. The sun would set soon. The first day of battle would probably end here.

"Well then, let's go home. I'm hungry. I've moved a bit too much."

"All troops pull back-! Don't be negligent with your guard!"

Schera gave the order to pull back, and the cavalry took formation, surrounding their commander, and began repatriating.

The first day of the Battle of Bertusburg ended with 6,000 casualties for the Kingdom's Army, and 8,000 casualties for the Liberation Army (Dead and wounded included).
The fiercest battle unfolded in the center wing. Constantly, the Kingdom's Army was superior as Carnac's unit was destroyed.
Borbon's division of the left wing succeeded in causing a stalemate, and Yalder's Legion of the right wing had waited for the sun to set, and began marching towards Carnas Plateau.
There would be many more casualties after this first day, and both commanders, Barbora and Altura, struggled with their power of command. With one order, they would create many thousands, many tens of thousands of casualties. They especially could not miss an opportunity to put a strategy into action. Also, they could not allow their inner anxiety to show on their faces. It would cause unrest in those around them and would probably become a weak link closely tied to their defeat.
These rigorous days that shaved away at their spirit would continue until this fight was over. Until then, they wouldn't know who held glory, and who held ruin.

Having narrowly avoided death, Fynn thanked his own good fortune, and thanked his excellent Adjutant.

"Milla. You saved me today. Really, thank you. That I'm able to live on like this, is thanks to you."

Fynn fixed his eyes on the face of his Adjutant and said his thanks. Her face red, Milla flusteredly shook both her hands.

"N, no. It was nothing. When I thought that you, Colonel, would be killed, I was frantic myself. Also, protecting you is my mission!!"

"All thanks to your accurate judgement. I got greedy by mistake. If possible, I thought I could win over the Death God to our side. Now that I think about it, that was a stupid endeavor. There is no way Death could understand the language of humans."

It was the first time Fynn had been struck by such powerful killing intent. It wouldn't be strange for plain soldiers to be unable to move with their knees quivering.

"That monster… returned safely despite receiving so many arrows. That horse too. I cannot believe it!"

"……She really is like, Death itself."

Muttered Fynn, touching a wound on his cheek. Schera had said earlier that, 'The ones who stole my last bit of food, was you guys.'
Around when the Liberation Army was in a dire financial situation, there was a rumor that Diener had provisioned food from somewhere.
Perhaps, Death was spawned from those sacrifices, Fynn thought. Which meant that she was an irreconcilable enemy. There would be no accommodation. Until she met her end, she would swing her scythe, killing, killing, and killing. Persuasion would absolutely not get through to her.
Diener's thinking was always grounded in reason. He was a man who wouldn't mind killing a hundred by his own hands to save ten thousand. That probably wasn't wrong. But, for those people included in the hundred, they wouldn't forget their resentment. And that resentment which burned hotter than the fires of hell…

(……Though thinking about it won't change anything. Nothing can be done about it, now that it's come to this. The only solution is to kill Death. …….If we can that is.)

The biggest problem was whether or not they could kill her. Frankly speaking, she couldn't be fought one on one. He couldn't believe it, but Schera surpassed him in physical strength. Fynn was probably better in technique and spearmanship. But, strength was what it came down to in a battle to the death. Superficial technique would be blown away in the face of overwhelming strength. Really, Fynn had been driven one step away from death.

"Next time, we will fight with you. 'Death God' though she may be called, if we all fight, I am sure we will manage somehow. Justice is on our side. We will not lose to something like Death!"

Fynn smiled at his constantly optimistic to a fault Adjutant. Fynn was captivated by

that side of her.
But, for that very justice, how many thousands of lives had been lost today?
It would be fine if they had resolved to die. But, what about the volunteer soldiers or the militiamen?
And who would take care of their families left behind? What even was Justice? Fynn didn't know.
But, he couldn't vocalize that. He had gambled on the Liberation Army's victory. That's why he had decided to rise up. He would keep running until the end. No matter how much blood would flow. He wouldn't die until then. Like he could let himself die. He would necessarily live until the end, and leave behind his name as a hero.

"Momentum has gone to our adversaries for the beginning of this battle. We have to recover from here. Starting tomorrow, we have to work even harder to make up for our disgrace today.

"Sir, we will serve with everything we have!"

—-That night.
Schera was having a meal next to her beloved. While gently petting her dear horse lying beside her with his eyes closed, she was drinking now cold soup. Seeing her, Katarina hesitantly asked her.

"……Colonel."

Katarina took out her cane from her waist. If Schera wished it, it wasn't impossible for this corpse to move. She began preparing her sorcery, and waited for the signal.

"No need. Even if you force it to move, it won't be my horse anymore. So, I will separate from this child here. It's a little lonely though, since this child has always been with me."

Schera quietly shook her head sideways. If Katarina used her necromancy, they could certainly be together like always.
But, it would be different, she thought. The soul accompanied the self. In that case, what was here, was only a lump of meat.
Though she looked at this meat, she felt no surge of appetite. Even if she ate it, she wouldn't be satisfied. So she wouldn't eat it; it surely wouldn't be delicious.

"……Forgive me for being so obtrusive. I beg your pardon."

Deeply apologizing, Katarina fixed her askew glasses.

"It's fine. I honestly thought about eating it, but I'll stop this time, since I don't have

the appetite for some reason. So, I won't eat this child. After this meal, I'll give him a burial. He carried me all the way here, even with his throat cut. Don't you think he did his best?"

"……Sir-!"

While his throat was perforated and his entire body was showered with arrows, he had carried his master back to her allied camp. That wasn't something that could possibly be believed. Yet, this horse had done it. While dribbling bloody saliva, he had carried out his duty.
It was originally Colonel Voleur's horse of the Imperial Army, but he had been tamed by Schera. Since then, he had carried Death and gone through fierce battles together. After struggling along to the ally camp, he silently kneeled, and snuggled his face up next to Schera's, and then expired, like he had used up all his vitality.
While still riddled with arrows, Schera took out all the arrows on her horse. After cleaning up her horse's body as much as she could, she thus then had a meal together.
The people not of Schera's Cavalry gazed uncannily at her. How could a person who showed such lack of mercy towards her enemy show such deep compassion towards just a horse? They couldn't understand. The cavalry members could understand the feeling. Like the saying, 'Horse and man are one being,' a horse was one's partner.
The soldiers of Schera's Cavalry, no longer able to bear this treatment akin to a criminal being publicly exposed, chased away the onlookers, and then only Schera and her horse's body were left.

"Can you prepare a horse for me to ride tomorrow? If possible, a strong horse like this child. The fight will yet continue. Katarina, sorry, but please."

"Please leave it to me. I will procure the finest and swiftest horse. ……Then, I will take my leave. Please call me if you need anything. I will leave one man behind nearby."

She gave a signal and called one cavalryman over. Katarina gave her orders in a small voice, and the soldier stepped back.
Katarina wanted to stay behind too, but there were many things that needed to be done. An enemy night raid wasn't impossible. They couldn't slip in their vigilance.

"Yeah, please do. I… will stay a little longer so you go ahead."

Katarina saluted and left the place behind.
In the darkness now returned to silence were left Death and her beloved horse. Until Schera felt satisfied, she kept on brushing the cold body.
With an expression unfit for a grim reaper who spread death, she rested her head on her horse's abdomen, caked with dried blood.

"Oh yeah, I haven't given you a name yet. We've been through so much, so I'll give you one now. Stay with me a little longer, until I can think of a good name."

The Pale Horse that raced across the battlefield with Death on his back, would never move again.

Chapter 28: Beans from the Major are Bitter and Astringent

Second day of the battle.
No large scale conflict occurred like the day before. It ended with small skirmishes where only arrows were fired.
Third Day.
The war was a complete stalemate. Both armies fell into a situation where they couldn't act. Both lines of battle glared at each other, and the sun idly set.

Then the Fourth Day.
Yalder's Legion had arrived near Carnas Plateau. Receiving that information, Barbora gave the order to commence the recapture of Carnas.
As planned, Octavio instructed Schera and Konrad's unit to drive into enemy lines. In tandem, Barbora and Borbon's units gradually advanced their lines to attract the enemy.
The Liberation Army also deployed Fynn, Behrouz, and Altura's main force.

This nightmare of a day would become the bloodiest day for the Liberation War.
Under the strong, blazing sun unthinkable for Spring, the battle began.

Yalder's Legion took formation to the west side of Carnas Plateau. Yalder grimaced, seeing the firm encampment built on the Plateau.

"This won't be good. They've built a tougher formation than estimated. This'll be tough to break in a short amount of time–the enemy's commander seems quite competent."

"Your Excellency, this is not a situation to be admiring them. We must capture it in haste."

Warned Sidamo, and Yalder decisively nodded saying that was obvious.

"I know that! Launch the signal flare! Inform the detached force on the other side to begin the assault-!"

"Sir-!"

Obeying Yalder's orders, a soldier launched a signal fire. This was to signal Schera and the others who should have been deployed to the east.
The plan was to divide the enemy's left wing and then pressure Carnas Plateau from both sides. Afterwards, they planned to gain control of it. The success of this plan hinged on matching their timing.

"Sidamo-! Advance the infantry! Target, the encampment on Carnas Plateau-! Coordinate the longbowmen and rain on them incessantly-! And break the enemy's defensive position with catapults-!"

“Understood. Messenger, tell all the infantry to march. Have the engineers construct catapults and then go support them. Absolutely do not expose them. Advance while staying together-!”

“Understood-!”

After instructing the messenger, Sidamo studied Carnas Plateau. From the encampment on the high ground proudly fluttered the Liberation Army’s flag.
It seemed nearly all the garrison was deployed to face them. Which meant the their east side was short of hands. If they attacked there, that would absolutely turn the tides. They could not overlook this chance. It was his given duty as a staff officer to seize even a moment’s opportunity.

“Rouse yourselves everyone-! This fight will decide the Kingdom’s fate! We must win-!”

“UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO–!!!!”

Encouraged Yalder, and the long serving soldiers that followed him from Antigua and Belta fervently cheered in response to their commander’s inspiration.
The training and morale of these soldiers that had gone through many hardships together were of a relatively high level in the Kingdom’s Army. There was no longer anyone here who would abandon the Kingdom.

—-Fighting erupted in the west of Carnas Plateau.

Borbon’s division had attracted the enemy’s right wing. Their leader Major General Borbon was an extremely passive and indecisive man, but this duty could rather be said to be perfect for him.
He hesitated at everything and took much time before making a decision.

“Your Excellency Borbon! Your orders!?”

“U, hmm. I received instructions from General Barbora to attract the enemy but. ……. Yeah, maybe we should attack? Or maybe defend. I didn’t learn about this you know. To stalemate the war front, we first—-”

“Your Excellency!”

“Wait, I’m thinking. I’m a man who’s made it to Major General. No matter the situation, I must move prudently. Losing here will create a situation we can’t recover from. If we don’t take the time… Let me think a bit more. In that one practice simulation, what did I do again…?”

Carefreely, Borbon tried to remember the contents of the simulation. His Staff Officer drew closer, losing his temper, but Borbon was not at all agitated.

“Your Excellency, we do not have such time! Battle has already started! You have to immediately give the soldiers instructions-!”

“Shut up! I’m thinking right now!“

“Y-Your Excellency!”

“Should we attack…? Should we defend…”

Borbon didn’t know which was better. Should they assertively launch an attack? Or should they devote themselves to defense? He hesitated and hesitated, and couldn’t give instructions to his subordinates. Ironically, that turned out for the better. Confronting them, Behrouz’s vanguard of the Liberation Army came for a resolute attack, but Borbon’s division didn’t go at them from the front, but evaded, slippery like an eel.
Borbon’s inability to make a decision ultimately became instructions for them to make the decisions on-site.
On the other hand, as Behrouz had long years of experience with commanding, his subordinates unconditionally abided by his instructions, believing that he would lead them to victory if they followed him
That dependence brought forth some delay in their movements, and they couldn’t catch up with the Kingdom’s Army arbitrarily moving, making decisions on-site and adapting themselves to the moment.
What the commander of the Kingdom’s front line prioritized above all was to not die. He would fight such that he wouldn’t violate military regulations, deal with it adequately, and then retreat. And then when he judged that there was an opening to take advantage of, he would adequately launch an attack, distinguishing himself.
Though their morale may be low, they were picked troops thoroughly trained by the now deceased Sharov. There were many excellent men among their noncommissioned officers.
Likely, had Borbon directly took command, they would’ve probably been quickly cornered and routed. That man had no experience fighting while leading a wing.

“Arrrghh, the enemy seems quite capable-! They pretend to attack and then withdraw, they withdraw and then attack. Avoid chasing too far, there’s likely troops in ambush-! Do not be pulled in-!”

Behrouz threw down the cane symbolizing his command and raged. They were an extremely difficult opponent to deal with. They skillfully warded off his momentum. It would be to the enemy’s plan to attack them if they chased too far like this.

“Your Excellency, how about ordering a general offensive? From what I can see, it is hard to say the enemy’s movements are deliberately commanded. Shall we apply some pressure and see what happens? Unexpectedly, they might readily collapse.”

A staff officer who held doubts about the leadership ability of the Kingdom’s commanders didn’t think those commanders could wield their command in such a way. He sensed that, likely, the on-scene noncommissioned officer was moving of his own accord. Of course, Behrouz understood that too. The enemy had no plan. From his long years of experience, he could tell that from intuition, but,

Behrouz shook his head sideways at his impatient staff officer's proposal. While having an expression of regret.

"Our Tactician firmly forbids a general offensive-. Until his strategy is put into action, we must not launch a general offensive, he told me. Perhaps the enemy commander is a genius, or maybe an incomparable idiot. It would be impossible for me to do what he's doing. Entrusting command to on-site judgement, if that goes poorly, the entire force will fall into chaos."

Presently, Behrouz had to continue this clumsy battle since his main unit was ordered to not move.
The right wing had completely fallen into a stalemate. Likely, as the enemy had expected.

(Endure until the start of the operation-! This battle's victory and defeat lies with Sir Tactician's command. You have to win at all costs; I leave it to you, Sir Diener!)

—-Bertusburg Plains eastern front: stalemate.

"Divide the enemy's left wing."
Having received Octavio's orders, Schera's Cavalry and Konrad's unit fiercely and resolutely attacked, cutting into the border between the plains and Carnas Plateau's east.
The cavalry led by Schera cut a hole in the Liberation Army's line, and plunged forward while rigorously coordinating with Konrad.

"Colonel, everything is as planned so far. I will send the signal to Major General Octavio!"

Katarina dismounted and began preparing to raise the signal fire.

"Alright, I leave the signal to you-! Someone, send contact to Konrad. Tell him to maintain his position until His Excellency Octavio arrives! Afterwards, we will invade Carnas Plateau-!!"

"Understood!!"

"Cavalry once merged with Konrad will fortify the line! Absolutely do not stop your movements! You'll be sniped!! Move around and trample the enemy-!!"

Schera pointed her scythe and raised her voice. The morale of her cavalrymen raised in conjunction. A messenger began running to Konrad's unit.

They had achieved their first aim of dividing the enemy, but that was just like temporarily splitting the seas.
If they didn't immediately build a dam, the waters would once again swallow them.
Around them, the Liberation Army began reorganizing their lines to surround them, and it was only a matter of time before their preparations were in order.

Schera's Cavalry had risked their lives to open a small hole. The rush of Octavio's division was essential for this operation's success.
Schera's Cavalry was 3,000, Konrad's unit was 5,000, and Octavio's division was 30,000. That was the total number of men invested into diving the enemy's left wing. If all went successfully, Carnas Plateau would be taken back, and besides that, they could even aim for the enemy's headquarters.
The orders given to them by the division commander Octavio were simple and clear. As soon as the signal flare came from Schera's Cavalry, he would instantly give the order to charge.
For something as simple as that, even the weak-hearted Octavio could accomplish it, Barbora had judged.

"……Your Excellency Octavio, the signal flare has come from Schera's unit."

The Adjutant Guerard reported to Octavio while peering through a spyglass.
Octavio detestably smiled and replied,

"Kukuh-, the judgement of a novice commissioned officer who doesn't know the art of war is unreliable. I decide when to move the division. It's still early for the assault. It's too early, don't you think?"

"Sir-, it does appear that the occasion is premature. Too impatient for merit, Colonel Schera has erred in her judgement. I believe the judgement of the man polished through hundreds of battles, His Excellency Octavio, should take precedence."

"Fumu, then let's go with that. Contact all the units. Strictly order them not to move no matter what until my signal. They are not to move no matter what occurs. Transgressors will be charged with violating military regulations and will necessarily be given strict punishment, tell them that."

"Understood. ……However, this is just as Your Excellency predicted. Your discerning eye leaves me in admiration."

Flattered Guerard, and Octavio pleasantly laughed.

"It seems the the Star God is our ally too. If General Barbora is promoted to Field Marshal, I will also surely be promoted. The rebel army will be annihilated, and the nuisances will die here. There will be no one standing in my way. Of course, you'll be following me too. I'm not a man who forgets loyalty."

"Sir-, I will follow Your Excellency to the ends of the earth!"

"Well then, let's watch together, the final moments of that little girl who doesn't understand her place, the collapse of the famed 'Death God' of the rumors. Just how will she die? Kuhaha-! This is so pleasing!"

Taking out the spyglass on his waist, he gazed with a sneer at the place where Schera's unit was fighting. The Liberation Army was hastily moving their lines to

surround Schera and the others. The gap that they had gambled their lives to open was closing without any resistance.

(Stupid little girl. This is what you get for thinking to stand shoulder to shoulder with me. Kukuh-, cry, resent your own stupidity, and die-!)

—-Octavio’s division, didn’t move.

Without Octavio’s division supporting their rear, Schera and Konrad’s units had been completely isolated. In not even an hour, they were entirely surrounded, and like drawstrings being pulled tight, they started being pressured by the Liberation Army. Katarina had sent up signal flares many times, but Octavio showed no signs of moving. They only watched them from far away.

“Why, why won’t they move-!? At this rate, the opportunity we created will—-”

Katarina threw down the fuming cylinder emptied of its flare. Schera calmed her while bitterly smiling.

“We were abandoned by that trash Octavio. It’s so refreshingly easy to understand.”

“But why-!? If they don’t rush in right now, this operation will be a complete failure-!”

“For that garbage, I’m probably more of a hindrance and of an eyesore than the rebel army. And so, he would throw away victory, and he would choose to let 8,000 soldiers die. Isn’t that it?”

Slowly rocking the scythe on her shoulder, Schera informed Katarina.
All while gently brushing the body of her new horse that she wasn’t used to riding yet.
As soon as she made it back, she would kill Octavio.

Absolutely, kill. Schera etched that onto her heart.

“N, no way.”

While touching her glasses with trembling hands, Katarina stood in mute amazement. This kind of unreasonable thinking, letting their chance of winning slip from right under them, was absurd. Why did such a fool have the position of a division commander? It was entirely incomprehensible.
Nevertheless, the reality was as Schera stated. Octavio’s division would not move.

“……Colonel. At this rate, we will be annihilated without accomplishing anything. We ought to leave behind one unit to buy time, and the other will invade Carnas Plateau, as per the strategy. Yalder’s Legion is, even now, conducting an offensive. We have to back him from our side.”

Sweat-smeared and dust-covered Konrad, out of breath, proposed to Schera.
His infantry in a square formation was eagerly taking up bow and arrow and lunging with spears, not letting the enemy approach.
The cavalrymen, who must not stop moving, were tracing a circle while battling with the enemy. But even so, they were at their limits. The enemy's forces were growing denser.
Soon, their dam would break. The numbers were too different.

"S, still, we're not in a position to go support, and if we do that means—-"

Katarina voiced her doubts. Konrad's proposal would end up sacrificing a unit.

"Of course, they need to be ready to be annihilated. Actually, they would certainly die. But, if we take back Carnas Plateau, this battle is still up in the air. If we can't take back the plateau here and we're annihilated, this battle is lost. So, we must launch an offensive no matter the cost."

"Well then, I and my cavalry will stay. To the east of here is seen the flag of the rebel army's Supreme Commander. Probably, Altura is there I think. If we kill her, this battle will be over won't you say? We'll act as the diversion, and kill the chief of the dogs while we're at it."

Schera pointed at the company lined in the distance. On the Liberation Army's flag was drawn the crest of the royal family. It was Altura's flag.
Still, struggling over there, no matter how one theorized, was impossible. They would have to break through many lines of battle stretched around that destination, and then further crush the defensive encampment. If one considered that enemies would come in support from all four sides, it was as impossible as overturning heaven and earth.

No matter how hard Schera fought, she couldn't defend against a rain of arrows. Even if Schera could defend, her horse couldn't. Once she lost her legs, she would be surrounded by infantry and eventually killed. Konrad shook his head sideways and objected to Shera's opinion.

"Colonel, with your cavalry, you can break through this encirclement and attack Carnas Plateau. Also, my infantry, I'm afraid to say, do not have any mobility. Let us remain behind."

"Major Konrad. Rank is absolute in an army. Didn't you say that the other day? A superior officer's order is absolute. That's what it means to be an army. Abide by my orders. Your unit will immediately commence an assault on Carnas Plateau."

Schera knocked down a flying arrow, and ordered. She took out a sickle from her waist and threw it at a man commanding the archers in the distance. The sickle stuck into the breastplate of his armor, and her target stopped breathing. The archers of the Liberation Army were unnerved, and they momentarily stopped their attacks.

Judging there was no more conversation, Schera decided to give the order to assault Altura's encampment.
Konrad let out a deep sigh, and took out a certain thing. This method would be faster than talking to this woman.

"……You haven't changed at all since Belta huh, Colonel Schera. Even on the verge of death you can be so aloof from the world."

"This way of talking suits you more than awkward formalities. Also, if you understand, hurry and go for me? We'll go take the head of the rebels now. There's no time for idle chatter."

Konrad pulled on the reins Schera was holding, and took out two large beans. There was one roasted bean with an x mark on it.
Roasted beans, a product of Belta that Schera had coveted before battles.

"……We'll decide it with this. Like how we did it at Belta. The one with the mark is the winner. The winner will advance toward Carnas, and the other will remain here and buy time. Okay?"

"……I want to say I refuse, but you wouldn't accept that would you?"

Asked Schera with an amazed expression. Konrad nodded.

"That's correct. Listen to the opinions of your seniors."

"……Fine. Let's hurry up and do this. There's really no more time."

Konrad mixed them in his hands, and held a bean in his left and right. Schera chose the left.
When his large hand with clots of blood stuck to it opened, there appeared the bean with the x mark on it.

"……Your luck is good, Colonel Schera. As agreed, you are the winner. The Colonel will go to Carnas Plateau. …….Leave the rest to me."

Konrad threw the bean with the mark to Schera, and hid the other.

"Show me your right hand. Open your right hand and show me, Major."

Not abiding by Schera's words, Konrad threw the bean gripped in his right hand into his mouth and exaggeratedly chewed.

"There is no time, Colonel. As quickly as possible, head to Carnas Plateau!"

Shouted Konrad, and Schera silently turned her horse's head. A promise was a promise. She was the winner, and Konrad was the other. That was it.

"……Katarina-, have the cavalry form ranks!! We will charge towards Carnas Plateau-!!"

"S-sir-!! Understood!!"

"Konrad, I leave the rest to you. Let us, meet again."

"Please leave it to me-!! Someday, once again!"

Konrad split his unit into three, and he made one go northward as a decoy and another one advance with the aim of enemy Supreme Commander Altura's encampment. The last one would support Schera's assault until their end. None of

them could hope to return alive.
The enemy had to protect Altura while preventing their withdrawal and further obstruct Schera's charge. The line of battle should be greatly disordered.
Konrad would participate in the assault at Altura's camp. He had decided to wield his spear until his life died out.
Schera reorganized the cavalry, and commenced the assault towards Carnas. Konrad's infantry cut into the enemy line to cover for them. The exhausted soldiers died one after the other, but Schera's Cavalry was steadily advancing.
Konrad took one last look at Death, and strongly burned the sight into his eyes. Despite being a little girl, she was a brave woman like from a fairy-tale. Yet even so, she had a gluttonous disposition, as well as behaviors and expressions unbefitting of a hero. Konrad couldn't hold back a sarcastic laugh.
A senior staff officer standing next to him spoke.

"Major, I have brought something nice, do we have permission to raise it? You will also be quite pleased with it, Major."

"……What is it?"

"This."

What the senior staff officer took out was, the flag of the ruined Fourth Army. It had the now deceased David's coat of arms on it.

"I permit it. Hmph, you're a fine hoarder."

"I didn't really like General David that much, but you've taken good care of us, Major. It has been an honor, coming this far together with you."

The surrounding soldiers looked at Konrad fleetingly, and nodded in agreement. Then, they pointed their spread towards Altura's camp in the distance.
Everyone had resolved themselves.

"……Sorry. I'll have you accompany me until the end."

"Your orders-!!"

"Fourth Army of the Yuze Kingdom, Belta Infantry Battalion, will begin the assault-!! Show them our mettle-!! Take Altura's head, the leader of the rebel army-!! Forward-!"

The Fourth Army's flag fluttered grandly. Konrad held his spear aloft and began running, acting as the vanguard.
The soldiers followed after him. Everyone was tired, and their breathing was erratic. A hail of arrows created many corpses.
Regardless, they charged into the enemy's line while shouting angrily and showing no fear.

"LONG LIVE THE FOURTH ARMY! LONG LIVE KONRAD'S BATTALION!!"
"LONG LIVE THE YUZE KINGDOM-!!"
"CHARGE-!!"

"Here we go-!!"

Konrad's spear pierced a Liberation Army soldier's throat. He immediately pulled it out and mowed down the body of a flustered young soldier.

"UOOOOOOOOOOOOO–!!!!"

"The guys from the Kingdom are coming-! Get ready-!"
"Don't these guys, fear death-!?"
"Don't let them break through! Ahead of them is Princess Altura's camp!"
"The enemy has split into three directions-! Y, your orders to pursue-!!"
"The enemy's a small force; what's there to be scared about-! Can't you calm down!!"

The Kingdom's Army charged until their ends, unafraid of death, and threw the Liberation Army surrounding them into chaos. The enemy forces had split into three directions–who and how would they pursue?
The commander's instructions were slow, since at this rate, it was certain their encirclement could be crushed. Just by his wavering, the number of victims increased.

Konrad's unit fought heroically. They broke through the line at three sites, and they used up all their strength struggling to the defensive encampment.

"Hah-, Hah-!"

In front of Konrad who wielded his spear all alone with wounds all over his body appeared the Liberation Army's second in command, Alan. He thought it strange that he was forced to kill a soldier.

"A commander with much renown I suppose. I am the Liberation Army's Vice Commander, Alan Keyland. I would like to have a bout with you."

"……Major Konrad of the Kingdom's Army! Here I come-!!"

Sword and spear struck each other. Alan made the best of his sword's lightness and unleashed a flurry of blows. Konrad awaited his chance while blocking them with his spear. He made Alan overextend, and immediately afterwards brushed away the blade with Alan's weight behind it.

"—-Kuh-!"

"Eat this-!"

Konrad's thrust grazed Alan's cheek. Alan flinched for an instant at the extreme sharpness of that spear thrust. Seeing this opportunity, Konrad went to unleash another one, but he collapsed to his knees the moment he did so. His stamina, had been exhausted.

"S, shit—-"

"Prepare yourself-!"

Alan's longsword was swung down from above.

"……D, David… Your Excellency, I… apo…logi…ze. Colonel, the rest—-"

Konrad fell forward. After Alan decapitated Konrad, he ordered for him to be courteously buried. He had been a magnificently brave warrior, rare in the Kingdom's Army.
Konrad was killed, the isolated soldiers were dying like following after him. The diversion unit that headed to the north was similarly annihilated. The unit that supported Schera, when they exhausted their arrows, charged in, and were extinguished one by one.

Riding parallel beside Schera, Katarina turned and looked behind her for a second. Konrad's unit was swallowed by the masses, and she confirmed their annihilation with her eyes.
At the same time, corpses planted behind them exploded, throwing up a smokescreen.

"Colonel, Konrad's unit was annihilated."

"……That so, unfortunate. But, we'll surely be able to meet sooner or later."

While swinging her scythe with one hand, Schera took out the bean Konrad had duped her with and put it in her mouth.
It was very bitter… and astringent. Schera's face scrunched up. Thanks to the blood that had been on his hands, it also tasted of iron.

"Colonel?"

"Nothing, it was just a bit bitter."

From behind them, enemy cavalry came in pursuit. The speed of Schera's Cavalry, advancing while crushing the enemy in front of them, was helplessly slow. Katarina sent a signal with her gaze to one rider, such that Schera wouldn't notice at all. She didn't need to know.
"Fight until you die, and buy time". This was the order Katarina had conveyed to them beforehand. In the end, she too intended to hold her ground and fight to the death.
300 soldiers farthest in the back silently turned around and began charging at the enemy pursuit force. They were like sacrificed pieces. So that their superior officer could advance forward, they were to buy time.
Katarina judged that they wouldn't be able to make it if she didn't prepare sacrifices, no matter how much skill Schera had.
Glaring at Carnas Plateau, Schera didn't notice. Also in a way that she didn't notice, Katarina and the others advanced while surrounding Schera.

"So this side really is lacking in men. The enemy garrison has sent their main force at Yalder's Legion. We'll go and raid the enemy encampment. We cannot waste the valuable time Major Konrad has created for us."

"Indeed. As planned, we will capture Carnas Plateau. I will absolutely do so."

Schera and 2,000 riders forcibly tore through the sporadic resistance while

determinedly rushing up the high ground. Yalder was making a fierce attack from the west. Carnas Plateau had unexpectedly been pincered according to plan. Of course, it could also be said that Schera's Cavalry was being pincered too.
How long could the 300 riders prevent that? A hopeless struggle to the death began.

The cavalry holding their ground to hinder the pursuit were loyally carrying out their duty.

"We are Schera's Cavalry."
"You shall not pass."
"Long Live Colonel Schera. Victory for the Colonel."

Schera's Cavalry swung their spears, shaking off fresh blood. Many arrows stabbed into their armor, and there was also someone who had one stuck in the middle of his face.
Yet even so, the cavalry didn't lose their will to fight, and continued to be an obstacle half way up Carnas Plateau. They had earned more than thirty minutes. They were approaching the limits of their endurance, but for their Lord, they kept on wielding their spears until their deaths.
—-200 riders remained.

"……D, don't be scared-! The enemy is wounded! Spearmen, advance-!!"

"B, but-! They're, monsters-! They shouldn't be able to move!"

"Silence-, this is an order! Advance-!!"

Receiving orders from a Liberation Army commanding officer, a spearman unit comprised of 500 men timidly sallied forth.
Seeing that from behind, Vander encouraged them, presenting a certain premium. He had received orders from Tactician Diener and had come to this place leading a unit.

"Those who kill that cavalry will be awarded one gold coin per head! Everyone liven up-!!

"O-One gold coin-!?"
"P-Per head!?"

"Yes! Authorized by Tactician Diener! For the Liberation Army's victory, forward-!"

The eyes of the soldiers changed. If they had one gold coin, they could live a life of luxury for months. Although the enemy soldiers were strong, they were already on the verge of death. They could crush them if they all went at once.

Vander raised his right fist and had the soldiers under his command wait on alert. They were equipped with mechanical bows, crossbows.

Crossbows were a weapon that anyone could regularly earn results with. It took time to reload them, but their power was guaranteed.
In a way unnoticed by the spearmen unit, they formed file and notched their arrows.

"Spearmen, charge-!! Kill the enemy!!"

500 men under the infantry commanding officer commenced the assault. Undaunted, the cavalrymen of Schera's unit flourished their weapons, spreading death.
It instantly became a melee, but the spearmen that had the advantage in numbers were completely pushed back. These cavalrymen, who had given themselves up for dead and in a sense had become Death's soldiers*, were not afraid of being injured. Their fighting spirit was incomparably different from the soldiers of the Liberation Army who had attachment towards life.

"S-shit-!"
"S-save me-! I knew this was impossible!!"

"Vict0ry for Colonel Schera-!!"

A rider pierced the head of the soldier seeking aid with a lance held in reverse grip. A spear from the side stabbed into the rider's abdomen, and he coughed up blood. He snapped the spear, and while toppling, gouged out the face of the paled man with its tip. The infantry lost his life, and the rider was still living.

Seeing this state of affairs, Vander executed the one order he had been given from Diener while shuddering inwardly.
"No matter how many sacrifices must be spent, kill the Death God and her cavalry."
He lowered his right hand, and the crossbowmen fired their arrows. The arrows pierced into not just the cavalry, but also their own allied infantry.

"C, Captain-! What are you doing! Are you sane-!?"

Angrily shouted another infantry commanding officer encircling the cavalry. Firing arrows that would friendly-fire their allies was not a sane command.

"Silence. Those guys cannot be killed if we don't do this. In that case, these are unavoidable sacrifices. They will throw away their lives and be pierced with Death's cavalry. —-Next, Fire-!!"

The second volley was fired. The cavalry and spearmen were mutually pierced and died.

"W-what you're saying doesn't make sense! Stop this for now-!"

"First Lieutenant. This is a battlefield. This is a plan to keep sacrifices to a minimum. Don't you understand?"

With an aggravated look on his face, Vander admonished the First Lieutenant still young in years

"—-B-but, it is not right to friendly-fire allies! They are our allies right!?"

"Those guys are Death's cavalry who will simply deflect our arrows. So live decoys are

necessary to stop them. They are charging of their own free will, brave and steadfast for the Liberation Army's great cause. I can only respect their determination. There's no problem, wouldn't you say?"

"Because you were the one who lured them with money!!"

"Do you curse their deaths? Our men are fighting for Justice. There shouldn't be anyone among our comrades in the Liberation Army who works for money. Their deaths are something to proudly boast of."

"—-tsk!"

"End them. Leave not one of them alive. Give them rest. They can't be saved anyway."

Vander snapped his fingers, and a third volley was done. There was not a single man moving after that attack. The soldiers of Schera's Cavalry on the verge of death were finished off by the soldiers surrounding them. The arrows had been coated in poison. No matter how much fighting spirit they had, it was meaningless if their bodies couldn't move.
This was the weapon prepared to reliably kill Death's soldiers.

"This, this is wrong-!"

The young First Lieutenant threw down his sword. The soldiers under his command tried to pacify him, but he indignantly shook them off.

"……First Lieutenant. Watch your words. Any further rash remarks will be taken as violation of army regulations. I will overlook it this once. Think well before you speak from now on."

"—-tsk. I will begin the pursuit now! Excuse me-!"

With a strained face, the young First Lieutenant returned to his unit.
Vander saw his former self in that man's image.

"……"

(……This is for justice. I'm not mistaken. I'm different from those guys who kill children. I am fighting for the people so. So, I'm not wrong. Right, I'm not wrong. I should be right.)

Repeated Vander in his heart, and he clenched his fist. Before him were strewn the corpses of his former comrades, and the corpses of his current comrades. He was in the right. If he didn't believe so, he wouldn't make it out of the battlefield. Therefore, he wasn't wrong.

"I, am not wrong-!"

Groaned Vander, running up the high ground while gazing at the cavalry raising that cursed, black flag.
He had one more duty. The messenger carrying a certain directive had probably already reached the Plateau's garrion.

—-Kingdom’s Army, Barbora’s headquarters.

“Send a messenger to Octavio-. Order him to immediately advance-!”

Barbora turbulently kicked his desk and ordered a messenger.
He had received reports that Schera and Konrad had already attacked and successfully divided the enemy. He was furiously angered at why Octavio hadn’t began the assault according to plan. They would be setback at this rate. No, they were probably already too late.

“If he resists, have the military police restrain him!! Can that man not even march his troops-!!?”

The messenger hastily ran, and Major General Larus next to Barbora observed the state of the battle using a spyglass. The opening that Colonel Schera had created, risking her life in a charge, was already filled. The surrounded soldiers that had charged in had a high possibility of being annihilated. They would die in vain.
This was around the time Yalder’s Legion would be climbing Carnas from the west. They couldn’t change the operation now. Due to Octavio’s foolish decision, the danger of being defeated drew near for the Kingdom’s Army. They had divided their large army to take back the Plateau. If that came to naught, the pace of this battle would lean towards the enemy,

“Shit-!! They’re useless, every last one of them-!! Why can’t they just take command-!? What the heck have they been learning while rising to a general those retards-!!? Octavio, this won’t end with just a warning-!!”

Barbora’s angry voice resounded emptily. Larus headed back to his own unit in silence without answering Barbora. He knew that Barbora didn’t have the capacity for leadership. How would this have ended if Sharov were here? While remembering his now-deceased superior officer, Larus deeply sighed.

(It still isn’t decided who the victor and loser will be. It’ll be difficult, but we have to recover somehow. No matter how completely rotten it is, this is the country His Excellency Sharov had decided to protect. I must repay the favors I’ve received from His Excellency, even at the cost of my life.)

Having received Barbora’s urgent demand, Octavio’s division finally decided to move out. The horns trumpeted sonorously while they exultantly pushed forward to the line of battle. The units in front of them were awfully exhausted after doing battle with Schera and Konrad. Octavio was convinced that if they were rushed by his large army from the front, they would certainly be broken through.

“Kill the foes of Schera and Konrad’s unit who had fought hard in vain and were annihilated! Oh brave warriors of the glorious First Army, advance forwards-! Don’t fall behind! Relentlessly trample them!! If you want achievements, they’re yours for the taking-! All units, charge!”

While spitting out shameless words, Octavio raised his sword. Clad in gorgeous armor without a flaw, he had a triumphant smile on his face. In this man’s mind, he had already won.

High Ground Encampment Built on Carnas Plateau.
Ghamzeh's division of the Liberation Army was being forced into a unsparing fight. The aggression of the Kingdom's Army making an onslaught from the west was severe, and the 20,000 soldiers given to him were split in half for defense. Precisely because it was a Plateau, its terrain was rugged, and it took time to rearrange the units.
He had been told by a messenger that the enemy unit assault unit to the east was completely surrounded at the foot of the Plateau, and that their annihilation was only a matter of time. Having no more pressure from the east, Ghamzeh had decided to meet Yalder's Legion, who was making a suicidal attack, with all of his forces.
He was enthusiastic about letting them taste a charge from the high ground.

"Face the enemy soldiers, and descend upon them-! Messenger, order the entire garrison to take the momentum and charge from the high ground-! Distinguish yourself as much as you want-! Our numbers are the same, and we have the advantage in morale and terrain; we cannot lose-!"

"Understood!"

"We'll get our revenge for the humiliation at Golbahar Ridge-! All units get to it-!"

(If we distinguish ourselves here, the Belta faction will be no more. We must annihilate the enemy division no matter what. It's not at all enough to just defend a high ground. Like I'll go along with Diener's whims-!)

Having finished organizing, the garrison at the worst possible time launched a general offensive at Yalder's Legion attacking them, when,

"Y, Your Excellency Ghamzeh!! E, enemy raid!"

"Calm down-! The division to the west is the only enemy! Seize all of them-!"

"T, that's not it-! Enemy cavalry are flooding from the east of Carnas with unstoppable pace-!! B-Black flag with a white crow coat of arms! It's Death! Death God Schera is here!!"

"Don't be ridiculous! Aren't those guys completely surrounded at the foot of the Plateau-!? Have you lost your—-"

An explosion blasted apart the defensive encampment as the enemy cavalry appeared. Running ahead of them was Death painted with blood. A corpse dangling from the tip of her scythe, she dashed towards him.
Death threw the corpse like a sandbag, and pillars of flame erupted along with the shock of an explosion. His soldiers writhed as they lost their lives. The cavalrymen behind her spread out and trampled the guards who had fallen into a state of panic. Ghamzeh doubted his own eyes.

(S-strange. Though I shifted the soldiers in the east, how could they have been broken through so easily!? I should have kept 5,000 guards there-!)

A misgiving flitted through the back of Ghamzeh's mind.

(……Wait. There was a report that one of Diener's subordinates was moving around the Plateau for some reason earlier. ……Don't tell me, this was Diener's—-)

Fresh, warm blood splattered on Ghamzeh's face, engrossed in his thoughts. When he suddenly snapped out of it, before his eyes was Death.
All of Ghamzeh's bodyguards had already been killed. In such mere short amount of time, a hideously cold-blooded spectacle had played out on the high ground encampment.

"You're surprisingly lax to be looking elsewhere in the middle of a battlefield. Well then, hurry up and die."

"—-Kuh-!"

That evil blade was swung downward at him, and tore Ghamzeh's upper body. As he had reflexively lurched back, he had avoided receiving a fatal wound, but it was now impossible for him to avoid the next blow.
While looking at his scattering, red blood like it had nothing to do with him, Ghamzeh was convinced of his own death. And, he understood why he would probably die.
—-He had been tricked by Diener. No matter how great she was, he didn't think she could break through 5,000 deployed in the east in such a short amount of time. No matter how strong she was, they should've at least been able to stall for time. —-But, here Death was.
Right, there were no guards. That man, had given Death a helping hand. Or rather, he ought to say that Diener had used Death's scythe.
This Carnas Plateau, was a gallow prepared for him. This was an execution for Ghamzeh, who would obviously become Diener's political opponent after the war. And the executioner, was the female officer in front of him.
Ghamzeh somehow unsheathed his sword with his slightly trembling hands.

(……Diener. I wish I could kill you directly. I'll be waiting for you in Hell-!)

The moment he tightened his grip on the sword, the crooked blade wailing in malice took off his head.

Having taken control of the high ground, Schera dismounted and picked up Ghamzeh's reaped head. His head had a resentful look on it.

"……Give us a shout of victory. With everything you have, so Yalder's Legion can hear. Convey to everyone that Carnas Plateau has fallen, that we've the enemy general's head, and that the operation, has gone properly."

She threw the head to Katarina and have her instructions.

"—-Sir-, please leave it to me-!!"

Schera noncommittally scattered roasted beans that she had gotten from Konrad on the red-stained earth. She wasn't thinking of anything in particular. It's just, she felt like she should do this. She closed the pouch and retied it to her waist. One mustn't

waste food.

Katarina installed the flag of Schera's Cavalry on the Plateau's encampment. Then, she raised the enemy general's head and yelled.

"Schera's Cavalry has taken out Carnas Plateau!! Victory is ours!! Long live Colonel Schera-!!"

"Hail Colonel Schera!"
"Long live Schera's Cavalry-!!"
"Hail! Hail-!!"

The cavalry members triumphantly waved their battleflags. Though they had been abandoned, they had under Schera captured Carnas Plateau.
While looking down at Octavio's division, the soldiers of Schera's cavalry forever raised their weapons to the sky and shouted in victory.

War cries resonated across the corpse riddled Plateau. The Liberation Army to the west of Carnas, shaken by the captured Plateau, began being routed all at once. Yalder crushed them as he ascended the high ground and successfully merged with Schera. Carnas Plateau had completely fallen under the influence of the Kingdom's Army.

—-Liberation Army Camp, Diener's Pavilion.

"Sir Diener. Carnas Plateau has fallen, and Ghamzeh has died in battle. The Death God is shouting in victory at Carnas."

"I see. As arranged, bring the special duty oxcart unit to the front. Wait for the signal."

"Understood."

"……."

Having received that report from his spies, Diener glared at Carnas Plateau with a cold, penetrating gaze. A black flag was fluttering on the high ground.

(Mostly according to plan. I've gotten Ghamzeh who would probably become an obstacle later on to die, and I've chased Death away to the high ground. My calculations were slightly off since the Kingdom's Army was much too incompetent, but that's not a problem at all.)

"Enemy division is approaching from the front!"

"Do not make any movement. Tell everyone to pull them in as far as they can. Also have the archers on standby. Until I give my instructions, you must not move. Those out of line will be strictly punished."

“Sir-!”

After the surrounding soldiers left, Diener stabbed a knife into one point on the map that was on the table. The sharp blade pierced where Royal Capital Blanca was.

(……At last. Now just remains my signal. With just that, this war will be put to an end. Everything is in the palm of my hands.)

“Let’s fully witness the Kingdom’s end. Kukuh-”

He stifled the laugher that almost leaked out, and he headed to the front lines after tearing the map with the knife. The state of the Kingdom’s Army as it was brutally annihilated, the soldiers of the Kingdom’s Army that would die screaming in anguish, this comedy of unsurpassed laughter that would soon unfold, he needed to watch this from a special, front-row seat.
This was his retribution to they who had raised him, used him, and then thrown him away. He wouldn’t let it end just yet. Prime Minister Farzam and King Kristoff–until he sent them to hell, his revenge wasn’t over. He would never let it end.

With restraints installed on their heads, a unit of Colonge cattle attached to wagons were released, in a way that only the lines of the Kingdom’s Army lay in their field of vision.
They breathed wildly through their noses, and they would begin intimidation and showing aggression towards the foes, but they couldn’t move their heads in the ways they wanted. Their fury seemed to be rising. The color of their eyes changed to an aggressive red.

“The special duty sorcerer’s deployment is finished.”

“Whenever you are ready; on your mark!”

“Special duty oxcart unit, commence the assault on the First Army.”

Diener plainly gave the order. The soldiers moved behind the oxen and took up their torture weapon: a curved short spear with a turn.**

“Oxcart unit commence the assault-!”

“Commencing the assault-! Target, enemy foremost line, the infantry line!”

“Alright-, get ‘em-!”

The soldiers stabbed the rears of the oxen with their spears, twisted, and gouged into them. They bellowed almost deafeningly, and the Cologne cattle began charging. An appropriate word to describe their stampede was ’headlong.’ Only the Kingdom’s Army in front of the beasts entered their eyes. While pulling the carts loaded with gunpowder and sorcery mines, the herd of Cologne cows plunged forward. Forgetting

themselves at the sharp pain, the Cologne cattle thought only to charge forwards, and forwards. They did not falter even when hit by arrows.

“Here they come! First line, raise the shields-! As long as we can stop the first charge, there’s nothing to fear-! Archers, shoot them down as best you can-!”

“Brace shields-!! Don’t break the line-!!”

The Kingdom’s line went to stop them. Since they had gotten intelligence beforehand that the Liberation Army would probably be using cattle, they entered defensive postures with shields set.
So that not even a bug could squeeze through, the soldiers huddled their bodies, lowered their waists, and braced their legs to stop the cattles’ rush.

—-The instant the oxcarts with momentum behind them brushed with the large shields braced by the soldiers, the sounds of chain explosions boomed on the battlefield

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Chapter 28: Beans from the Major are Bitter and Astringent

*死兵 This word again, as seen in chapter 17 and 23. Literally Death Soldier, meaning someone who is prepared to die in battle. Think of it like ‘martyr.’ Pretty sure the author is making wordplay, but it sounds so corny when I contextualize it.

**I have no idea what this is supposed to be.

Chapter 29: I'm a Little Tired so I Don't Really Want to Eat Right Now

Shrieks and screams of the Kingdom's soldiers echoed on the plains. The cluster of oxcarts wreaked havoc on the line of battle of Octavio's division.
They had done fine up to pushing back with their shields. Immediately following, the carried sorcery mines exploded at the special duty sorcerer's signal for ignition.
To enhance its destructive power, the carts were packed with large quantities of gunpowder and sharp, metal scraps. Those scattered in all directions, maiming the limbs of the Kingdom's soldiers or flat-out penetrating their bodies, and many lives were stolen.
Those that died were still counted as lucky. Soldiers struck by the iron shrapnel were in agony. They were deprived of their strength to fight, and they couldn't even die, only able to writhe in intense pain.
The sorcery mines were gotten from the Empire, but they didn't particularly excel in killing or wounding. Sure, they had destructive power, but they could blow away several tens of men at most. If their purpose was to cause losses in men, a large quantity of them needed to be invested, and the cost and labor would be too much.
For the sake of reducing costs with more or less the same effectiveness, Diener had improved the weapons, which originally had to be laid, for use in a charge.
The role expected of these oxcarts, was to unveil a depiction of hell and to drain the enemy's fighting spirit; to reveal all too sickeningly that even if the soldiers stopped them, they would die; and to display that if they evaded, the oxen would plunge even further deeper into the formation and spread the damage. It was their aim to force the enemy into two unreasonable alternatives. Against the Kingdom's soldiers who had low morale, these oxcarts were almost painfully effective weapons.
There was no soldier of the Kingdom brimming with loyalty and bravery who would volunteer to be a shield, seeing the disaster before their eyes.
200 oxcarts each were sent into the center wing and left wing as the first wave.
The battle lines of the Kingdom's Army had fallen into chaos, and there was no longer any control. It was inconceivable that either generals, Octavio or Borbon, had the leadership ability to rally the present state. In this like a bolt out of the blue situation, they only stood in simple amazement. And, there were still prepared many more oxcarts, loaded with weapons of slaughter.

"Calm down-!! Don't break the line!! You must not let those oxcarts through!!"

"D-don't joke around! Do you think us shields!!?"

"Do you think to go against orders!!? If they break through the line, they'll explode inside the ally camp! Stop them here and keep the damage to a minimum! I won't forgive running away!"

"Like I can follow that order!! You retard-!"

"W, what did you—-"

Knocking down the officer loyal in his service, the Kingdom's soldiers began running away for their lives.

The second wave of oxcarts broke through the advance guard and detonated inside the formation of Octavio's division.

"W, w, what is this. Just what the heck is going on! Adjutant, explain!"

"I do not know! B, but, at this rate, our division will be annihilated! Your Excellency! Your orders!"

The Adjutant sought instructions for Octavio, but he was in panic and not in a position to give any.

"W, wait! Those oxen are coming this way-! Hurry and stop them-! Make them stop!!"

"Bodyguards, stop those oxcarts!! Protect His Excellency's body! Why have they been allowed to penetrate this far-!!? What're the front-line soldiers doing!?"

The bodyguards around Octavio blocked the oxcarts using their bodies as shields. No matter what kind of person their chief was, bodyguards had to protect at the expense of their lives. The Cologne cows' rush was stopped a small distance away from Octavio's headquarters.
The Liberation Army sorcerer watching with a spyglass chuckled, and sent the signal for detonation.
Half of the bodyguards enveloped in the explosion at point blank range died instantly, and the rested squirmed on the ground while sustaining fatal wounds.
The entrails of his bodyguards flew around before Octavio's eyes. Death had come this close before him. Octavio felt deep-seated terror.

"T, this is the enemy's new weapon. I must go report to General Barbora. If he doesn't immediately receive the particulars from me! G, Guerard, I entrust command afterwards to you!"

Cried Octavio tremblingly, wiping off the clots of blood stuck to him. He didn't want to be in this kind of place. Why did a high ranking general like him have to be in danger of death? In Octavio's mind existed only the thought of leaving this place immediately.

"Y-Your Excellency, if Your Excellency escapes now, our allies will be routed. We must rally our position, somehow, here! I beg of you, please, refrain yourself and take command. This is something only Your Excellency can do!"

"S, shut up, silence-! I'm not running away; I'm just going to directly report! I'll be back instantly! I give command to you until then."

"—-Y, Your Excellency. A-are you abandoning us?"

"I leave it to you, Guerard! I won't forget your loyalty in my lifetime!"

Octavio quickly got on his horse and began heading towards Barbora's headquarters while taking his remaining bodyguards. Left behind in Hell, Guerard muttered one phrase while his face was turning pale. Despair, disappointment, regret, he fully let all of it out.

"……It's over. This is… hopeless."

The Kingdom's Army, his own fame, and the Yuze Kingdom. Rampaging oxcarts were imminently approaching. In the end, after calling to mind as many defamations as he could think of against Octavio, Guerard's time came.

Octavio's division of the center wing completely fled. News spread that the commander had taken off, and the soldiers of the Kingdom's Army were falling apart, routed. Diener released oxen which were not carrying sorcery mines and had them drive into the infantry again. The soldiers of the Kingdom began escaping at the mere sight of them. The flow of battle had instantly gone to the Liberation Army.
Borbon's division in the left wing was in mostly the same state. The commander had not run away, but he couldn't give out effective orders. He couldn't even make the decision to retreat. This was karma for having him here entrusted with command. The noncommissioned officers, prioritizing their lives, threw down their weapons and deserted.
Behrouz of the Liberation Army wouldn't let that chance go by, and he decisively carried out a general offensive. He stood at the head of the army and overran the left wing in a single stroke. Major General Borbon escaped to the rear with what little troops he had under his command… with a staff officer and bodyguard dragging him by both arms.

Barbora's headquarters in the middle of the torn off middle and left wings.
Larus, seeing through the nature of the enemy's weapon, immediately spread out the soldiers, trying to keep damages to a minimum.
For the oxcarts, he ordered them to halt the oxen's feet. Though it was a makeshift plan, it was also the best means in this situation.

"Throw your spears; stop the oxen's feet! Don't rush, calm down, and aim!!"

"Spearmen, throw-!!"

Despite being on the back foot, Larus's soldiers followed directions and threw their spears. With several spears striking their legs, the Cologne cattles' balance was broken, and they toppled sideways. The oxcart's weakness was the weight of the wagon. Their advance could be stopped by pushing it over from the side or attacking the oxen's legs.
From behind the infantry braced with shields, archers disposed of the oxcarts with fire arrows. The sorcery mines wouldn't explode so long as they weren't given a signal of magical power, but the loaded gunpowder was another story. When they ignited, the carts scattered iron shrapnel with a thunderous roar.

"Tell the soldiers on the front lines to aim for the oxen's feet with their spears-! Or try to topple them over with an attack from the side! We can't deal with them any other way in this situation! Absolutely do not stop them from the front; don't die in vain!"

"Sir-!"

Larus raised his voice, and the messenger saluted and headed to the front lines.

"To think they'd let regular herds of cattle infringe this far-!"

(If we lay out stakes, or maybe defense fences, we can cope. But we won't make it in time. Shit-, at this rate…)

Looking around him, all he saw were injured officers and men. Looking at the front lines, his allies were completely routed. Just what should he do in this situation?
Larus turned around, and headed to Barbora's headquarters with quick steps. Now that their main forces had collapsed, the next to be surrounded would be their headquarters. They had to make a decision.
Larus recalled Sharov's final words, and cursed in his mind.

(As Field Marshal Sharov said, I knew we shouldn't have started an attack. We should've hardened our defenses and waited for an opportunity. If we were in the mountains, this predicament would've been impossible-!)

Headquarters.
Messengers were coming back and forth in a flurry.
Octavio who had made a getaway and came here was giving a frantic explanation to Barbora who had a vein bulging on his head.
The disapproving gazes of the staff officers shot through Octavio. Barbora was holding back his anger while grinding his teeth.

"Y, Your Excellency. That is the enemy's new weapon. It has terrifying power! I had to come report immediately and came here without looking back at the danger. Please, please understand-! I absolutely did not run away!"

"……And so, what happened to your soldiers. Did you, the commander of all people, abandon his soldiers and scurry home alone? And you still call yourself a division commander!? Do you have no shame as a Major General!!?"

"Y, you are mistaken! I was just too anxious about Your Excellency's well-being, and I could not stop worrying—-"

"Shut up you fool-!! Know some shame-!!"

Barbora's fist impacted Octavio's face. Blowing blood out of his nose, Octavio prostrated.

"—-F, f, forgive me-"

"And that's not all! You bastard, why didn't you rush in like the plan said! What were you thinking idly letting our chance of winning escape-!?"

He kicked Octavio's body. That didn't quell his anger.

"T, the signal flare. The signal flare did not go up! All the blame is with Colonel Schera! It should have been impossible for such a lowly little girl to accomplish that important duty in the first place!"

Protecting himself was more important than victory or defeat. If he was tried for violating military regulations, it would be capital punishment. Octavio frantically pleaded to avoid that.

"The signal flare did in fact come from Schera's unit, and reports say you disregarded it! Octavio, I'll have you make up for this misconduct with your life-!!"

Barbora was clearly at the limits of his patience. He unsheathed his sword and pressed it against Octavio's neck. Frightened, Octavio grinded his forehead on the ground as a sign of remorse until he bled, and he apologized profusely.
With tears and mucus streaming down his face, his figure as he begged Barbora for sympathy wasn't very much like a general's.

"……Your Excellency Barbora. We do not have the luxury to concern ourselves with this idiot right now. I believe we should save dealing with him after this is over. The morale of the soldiers, which are already low enough, will drop even lower."

Advised the returned Larus. Even as a joke, he hadn't ever heard of judging a man entrusted with an entire division during a battle. Their precious time was being wasted even now like this. In the first place, just who was the person who appointed this fool to division commander and gave him an entire wing? After glancing at Octavio, Larus gave Barbora a cold look.

"—-Military policemen, restrain this buffoon-!! I'll lop off that filthy head another day!"

"Y, Your Excellency, Pardon me. Please, have mercy!! Your Excellency, Barbora!"

"Silence-! Policemen, hurry up and take him away! I can't bear the sight of him!"

"—-Sir-!"

The policemen grabbed Octavio's hair and left the headquarters. His crying voice faded into the distance.
The place fell into silence, and Barbora adjusted his loud breathing. He could hear the sounds of explosions in distance every so often.

"……Major General Larus. How's the situation?"

"The battle is on the brink of being the worst case scenario. There are already strong indicators of defeat. It probably would not take even an hour until the entire army is routed. Will we fight until the end, or will be escape? I would like instructions from you, the Army Corps commander."

"……Where, where, where did it all go amiss!! Shit-!! Why-!! Didn't we have the overwhelming advantage until just awhile ago!!?"

Barbora derangedly mangled his pavilion with his sword. While expressionlessly observing him, Larus stated his opinion.

"We can still maintain semblance of an army. Yalder's flag can be seen from Carnas Plateau. A withdrawal is possible right now, and we could probably minimize the damages. Your Excellency, your prompt decision."

"Y, you're asking me to run away? The Kingdom's fate hangs in the balance of this battle. Do you understand that? If we, retreat, we no longer—-"

Being defeated in this battle, meant losing their hegemony of the Canaan Area. The taking of the City of Canaan and Roshanak Stronghold would be forced down their throat. Those places would be helpless in enemy territory. If they lost control of Canaan, the gates to the Royal Capital would be opened, and all the feudal lords that

had stubbornly stayed on the fence would all go join the Liberation Army. —-And if that happened, it was over.

"There is no longer anything we can do. Will you have everyone die here? Or retreat, rally our forces, and attempt a comeback somehow? Your Excellency Barbora. You must decide. This is your final duty as an Army Corps commander."

"……..tsk."

Barbora couldn't do it. If he wanted to chose a proud death, he ought to bravely fight to the death here. But, the lives of several tens of thousands of men were in Barbora's hands. As a commander, wasn't it the right choice to save even one more soldier? His pride as a warrior, or his duty as the highest commander. Barbora anguished, caught between the two. He couldn't answer.

"If you will not do anything, I would like you to let me return to my unit. I want to die together with my subordinates if I am going to die. Sorry, but I do not have any interest in staying with your until our final moments."

Coldheartedly declared Larus as he turned on his heels, but Barbora detained him in distress.

"…..I, I understand. We'll retreat. Order the entire army to retreat! We cannot be wholly annihilated here-!"

"Understood. I will notify the entire army. I will also send a messenger to General Yalder on Carnas. ……Excuse me then."

Larus saluted and began preparations for the retreat. Barbora covered his face with both hands and crumbled down on the spot. For this man who took command of the First Army after Sharov died, this was his first, but greatest failure, and it crushed him.

—-At the same time, Carnas Plateau, high ground encampment.
One could witness all too clearly the sorry state of the Kingdom's Army from the high ground. Yalder and Sidamo had troubled expressions.
As for Schera, she finally was able to have a satisfying meal and was cheerful. She got hungry after being active.
Today's lunch was Cologne beef jerky taken from the enemy camp. She didn't know why they had such an expensive item, but who cared, and Schera chewed well and savored the delicious meat.
The more she chewed, the more the taste came out, the taste of high-grade Cologne beef. A cavalryman next to her was humming. Schera drank water from a bamboo flask, put the meat between two slices of bread, and bit down. If this meat was fresh and eaten just slightly grilled, it would probably be supremely delicious. But, she couldn't be spoiled.
It was happiness just being able to eat.

“Sidamo. I think we ought to descend the Plateau and immediately retreat. We would die in vain trying to attack the enemy lines right now.”

Yalder cast aside any wishful thinking and calmly surveyed the situation. If he were a commander on the front lines, he would’ve charged in even if he had to do it alone. This battle’s significance was just that immense. He far from intended on shamelessly surviving after being defeated.
But, as a division commander right now, he had to take the soldiers home to the Royal Capital, while keeping sacrifices to a minimum somehow, for the Royal Capital’s defense.

“I am of the same opinion. The soldiers have expended all their energy to take this Plateau and are exhausted. Regrettably, we would probably be annihilated before reaching the enemy lines. Even fighting on willpower has its limits. In that case, we ought to immediately change course and head to Canaan. We can still repel pursuits.”

“……This situation… has happened before. Sidamo, at the same time we withdraw, send scouts to Canaan and Roshanak. Have them verify that the flag of the Kingdom’s Army is being flown.”

When Yalder was defeated trying to capture Salvador, Antigua fell during his retreat. This situation resembled that. Nay, this situation was probably even worse. It wouldn’t be strange for the enemy to have already reached them.

“Have they already fallen, or have they—-”

“If we tell them of our defeat, what those guys on the fence will do is evident. We must avoid being pincered. For now, we evacuate. Before we’re surrounded.”

“Colonel Schera! We’ll be changing course! Your unit will stand as the vanguard, and we’ll head towards Canaan! Use your mobility and throw the enemy into chaos! Make them know the terror of Death!”

Sidamo shouted his instructions in an angry voice rare for him.
Suddenly receiving a directive, Schera choked a couple times, and then saluted. The dried meat had caught in her throat.

“……Understood!”

“I leave all decisions to your judgement!”

“Colonel, don’t die in a place like this. ……Let’s, meet again.”

Yalder patted Schera’s shoulder and left to command his soldiers.
Seeing Sidamo chasing after him at a quick pace, Schera spoke up to Katarina.

“We’ve gone through so much securing this place, yet it seems like it was a waste of effort. Just why did we fight I wonder.”

Konrad’s death, and the many deaths of her important comrades. The remaining forces of her cavalry, were probably around 1,500? All their sacrifices to take control of the high ground amounted to: raising a flag and everyone shouting.

"…….Colonel."

"So be it. When we return, I'll kill that pig Octavio. In a way he'll really feel it, and never forget."

"Sir-!"

"….Also, I won't forgive you for moving my cavalry without my permission a second time. Engrave this upon your heart."

Schera glared at Katarina through narrowed eyes. Katarina lowered her head in shame as she touched her glasses with trembling hands.

"S, sir. U-understood. Please, forgive me, Colonel."

"I don't want to be saved if it means abandoning my subordinates. After all, I would rather be with you all, my comrades who I've eaten together with for so long. You need to include me too, and I won't ever allow you to leave me out."

With a faint smile, Schera affectionately tapped Katarina's shoulder.

"……C-Colonel."

"Alright, let's go. It won't do if we're not the vanguard. —-Schera's Cavalry will descend Carnas Plateau, and change course for Canaan-!! We'll trample anyone who dares get in our way!!"

"Understood-!!"
"Schera's Cavalry, move out!!"

Yalder's Legion and Schera's Cavalry gave up Carnas Plateau and withdrew, aiming for Canaan. While repelling the pursuit units, they had a splendidly successful retreat. There were hardly any casualties, but that was ultimately because the Liberation Army soldiers, upon seeing Schera, had gotten cold feet. Schera was feared to that degree.
On the other hand, the remaining soldiers of Barbora, Larus, Octavio, and Borbon were relentlessly pursued by the Liberation Army, and they received heavy losses. All will to fight gone, people kept surrendering or deserting, bringing about a state which could only be described as a scene after a disaster.

The City of Canaan, hearing about their defeat, acted on a secret agreement made previously and changed affiliations to the Liberation Army. They postured to repel the retreating Army of the Kingdom. Obviously the feudal lords would protect themselves. They immediately persuaded the guards, and as a result of giving speeches to the populace, there was no one in opposition, and the City of Canaan fell into the Liberation Army's hands.

Opinions in Roshanak Stronghold were split. —-Should they continue in their loyalty to the Kingdom, or should they surrender to the Liberation Army.
In the end, a fight to the death broke out, and when the gates were thrown open by the advocates of capitulating, the Liberation Army surged in, and the stronghold fell,

the resistance of the guards in vain.
Having lost the critical position that was the Canaan Area, the Kingdom's Army continued to take flight and headed for the Royal Capital. The soldiers that had numbered 150,000 before the battle had now already diminished to 40,000. Only 20,000 had died in the pursuit, but the number of deserters was unordinary.

Yalder, who had volunteered to be the rearguard, stretched out a formation across the thin road connecting Canaan to the Royal Capital and resolutely resisted.
They smashed a unit of the Liberation Army that was impatient for success, and he displayed such command that he routed them.

"Hahaha-, that's not nearly enough to surpass I, Yalder! Come at me with at least 100,000! Like I'll easily be killed by you rebel army youngsters! —-Sidamo, raise it-! Let them know that Yalder is here!!"

"Sir-!"

At the signal, Sidamo hoisted the flags of the ruined Third and Fourth Army Corps. They were symbols of Yalder's glory, and his failings, but they were also his pride for having fought and survived with his soldiers. The blood-smeared, mud-caked flags caught the wind and sailed, like showing themselves to the Liberation Army.

"As long as I'm here, the Kingdom will not perish. To the bitter, absolute end, I will fight! Hahaha-! Sidamo, sorry, but you'll be accompanying me to the end!! If you must resent, resent your own bad luck-!!"

"I've prepared myself for that way ahead of you. I as well must beg Your Excellency's forgiveness, but I will be interrupting you a bit. —-Send the signal to the scouts-!!"

When Sidamo gave his order, his soldiers turned to the cliffs and waved red flags. Conspicuously, they used their whole bodies to wave them.
A short second later, sounds of an explosion roared from the cliffs on both sides. And a few seconds later, a landslide of boulders sealed the narrow road.
The Liberation Army spread out in the front hectically began backpedaling, else they'd likely be caught in the avalanche. They hadn't known this area's geography in detail. Having researched the topography beforehand, Sidamo, assuming the worst, had prepared a plan to impede them, a plan to stop them on their final steps, in the very worse, worst case scenario.

"Nice going Staff Officer! But, this means that you were resigned to losing. I'll have you court-martialed-!"

Said Yalder at an attempt at humor, and Sidamo feigned ignorance with an innocent face.

"It is difficult to ascertain what you mean. Anyway, with this, we have bought a short amount of time. Let us garrison Cyrus and Sayeh and ready ourselves."

"Alright, then we move out! This is not a retreat! Don't forget that this is just changing course! Hahaha, I'm absolutely not making excuses. This is -empty-bravado!"

"Move out! We're to move out before the enemy readies themselves!"

“Yo Sidamo, hearty as usual. What a reliable man. Alright everyone and all you staff officers, follow his example and stick your chests out! We are the elite unit that took down Carnas Plateau! We march; I intend on making a triumphant return!”

Heroically laughing Yalder swept up his formation and marched.
He knew that the situation would become unsalvageable soon, but as a man of military, he would fight until his end.
He had resolved himself a long time ago. From that day his suicide was stopped.

Barbora, Borbon, and the restrained Octavio entered into the Royal Capital. Octavio was house confined until the investigation was over.
Yalder’s Legion entered Sayeh Fortress, and Larus’s division and Schera’s Cavalry garrisoned Cyrus.

They had to buy time in these two fortresses until the First Army could finish their reorganization. They tried raising supplies from the surrounding cities, but the feudal lords refused them.
Their defeat was widely talked about due to Diener’s workings, and the feudal lords had the strong impression that the Kingdom was already finished.
Unable to prepare sufficient supplies in both fortresses, Cyrus and Sayeh, it seemed likely that a siege was heading their way.
On their separation, Yalder had strongly taken Schera’s hands and spoken to her with a mischievous-feeling smile–a smile wicked like a brigand’s wrinkled his face.

“Colonel Schera. Let’s meet again at the Royal Capital. When we repel the rebel army, come to my estate like I promised a few days ago. I’ll prepare a huge feast to your pleasure. Look forward to it.”
“Acknowledged, Your Excellency. I will visit without fail.”
“Sidamo, you say something too! We won’t be able to meet for awhile!”
“……I only have one thing to tell you, Colonel. I said this before, but if you’re going to die, die outside. It takes money and hard work to raise cavalry. Dying inside a castle is nothing but wasteful. ……Do you understand??”
“Colonel Schera, completely understands!”
“Then good…….Let’s meet again.”
“My god, you guys have no sense of glamour. Well, it’s probably good that you stay true to yourselves. Wahahaha-!”

Remembering their conversation, Schera was resting in one of the rooms in Cyrus.
Schera was slightly tired.
Her body was wrapped round and round in bandages. Her arrow wounds hadn’t yet healed. It wouldn’t be a problem on the battlefield, but her body was slightly feverish.
So she could recover before the next battle, she had secluded herself in her room like this.
When she reclined on the bed face-up only in her undergarments, a grand knocking came at her door.

“Colonel, excuse me for interrupting your rest!”

“……What is it?”

Languidly replied Schera.

“Sir-, there is an urgent matter that must be conveyed to you Colonel, and I have come to report.”

“What is it, I wonder. I’m changing right now, so will you tell me while I’m at it?”

Schera received the most crucial piece of information from the cavalry soldier.

“Sprouts of the Colonel’s potatoes have come out!”

“……Potato sprouts?”

A mass of seed potatoes appeared in the hot, hazy depths of her mind. Sprouts shot up from the seeds one after the other, and collectively became stalks as tall as trees. The stomach wouldn’t be filled by potato sprouts or stalks, but when they grew that big, it honestly seemed like a substantial meal.

“The potatoes that the Colonel planted! They seem to be growing well, and sprouts have come out!”

Hearing that, the giant potato sprouts in her imagination vanished somewhere.

“I’ll come immediately; standby at the field!”

Schera jumped off the bed, just so that she could say it faster, and replied loudly. Whether the potatoes would remain safe was extremely important. She had to deliberately check. This wasn’t the time to be lying down.

“Understood. I will do my best to not let the crows devastate them!”

From behind the door, the footsteps of the soldier enthusiastically leaving could be heard.
Schera stood up, opened the window, and looked up at the sky–the blue sky, with not a single cloud. Blowing against the wind swayed the Kingdom’s flag and the flag of Schera’s Cavalry.
Around them, crows were circling. Was it perhaps because they had no food and were searching for some? There were no bread crumbs left over there though.
Schera closed the window. The crows looked over her, as if demanding food.

“……”

(After everything, I’m back here. I wonder, if my final home is this fortress. It would be nice if I could eat my own grown potatoes.)

Schera’s home–Cyrus Fortress–was already preparing for battle. Defense commander Larus was endeavoring to raise supplies until the time came, and was also striving to fortify the ramparts.
He prepared for enemy trench warfare, laid out many traps, and deepened the outer moat. Larus did everything he could.
After the Liberation Army gained total control of Canaan, they would sortie in no time and head for both Cyrus and Sayeh. The battle would begin extremely soon probably.

“There’s many things left to do, so we have to keep doing our best, just a bit more. It’s not over yet. ……Right, wouldn’t you say? Just a little bit more, let’s do our best.”

Only for a moment, Schera looked over her shoulder and smiled, then she turned back and began walking.
—-But there was no one behind her.

Chapter 30: Fun Fortress Life

"The Kingdom's Army has been defeated at Bertusburg Plains," "Canaan has fallen, and the Liberation Army is beginning to march towards the Royal Capital."
The sensational news was advertised everywhere by the Liberation Army, and it had even reached up to Madros in the Kingdom's northern region.
Leader of the Fifth Army, Kerry, urgently assembled the military and staff officers to discuss about their policy hereafter.
Everyone's faces were gloomy, and they couldn't conceal their unease. With his arms crossed, Kerry's eyes were shut in his seat.

"……Your Excellency. Now that Canaan has been lost and the First Army that was the bulk of the Kingdom's forces was devastated, the Kingdom's fate is in a precarious situation. You must decide."

Said a staff officer, resolved. Resolved, for something everyone understood: to abandon the Kingdom and side with the rebel army. This was the only road that would ensure Madros's survival.

"So it ultimately comes to this…"

"Old man! That isn't the case right!? Yalder and his group risked their lives and fought to save Madros! Isn't it our turn now to save them!?"

Kerry's second son, Captain Darus Madros, slapped the round table and stood up. He normally wouldn't have been permitted to participate in the war council based on rank, but he was attending as Kerry's son. Either way, he would one day aid his older brother and protect Madros. He needed to accumulate experience.
The eldest brother, Denim Madros, was taking command at the front line forts. If he were to die by chance, Darus was obligated to succeed after him. That was the destiny of those born into the Madros family.

"Sir Darus. What you say certainly stands to reason. As a warrior, that is correct. But, you fail as a politician."

Admonished the staff officer in charge of Darus's education.

"What failure! To even throw away our pride, why must we join the rebel army-!? What justice do they have!? They aimlessly spread the fires of war; just who is the one tormenting the people!?"

"Then tell me, Darus, what concrete plan do you have? If you have one, let's hear it. You don't need to hold back; tell us your great idea to save the Kingdom while protecting Madros. Right now. There's not much time left."

Pressed Kerry in a composed tone. Darus hesitated. There could be no such convenient plan.

"……In order to buy time, send out the troops. Even a little is fine. Support the First Army until they can rally themselves and fight back! There's significance in the Fifth Army showing themselves–we can show them that we won't abandon them!"

“Our Fifth Army is occupied keeping the Empire at bay. We cannot deal with a threat from behind us. If you plan to save the Kingdom, you must also forsake Madros, and such an act is impossible for me. My mission is to protect the lands and people of Madros. I don’t even have to think about it-”

“You would throw away your honor and pride for that!?”

“Exactly. Whether it be honor, whether it be pride, do you think you can survive with such crap like that? Every man on this earth if shown an opening are beasts who would steal for their own profit. Even if I have to drink mud, eat bugs, and cover myself in filth, I will protect Madros. At the very least, I’ve seen the Liberation Army’s tactician. That man plans on using us. We probably won’t be treated poorly.”

“……shit-”

Darus kicked away his chair and went to leave. He too saw himself as a man of the Madros family. But, was it really okay to take it this far? Hadn’t Yalder saved them from the Empire’s invasion? And hadn’t Schera braved the danger, stepped into the heart of the enemy, and saved Madros?
In their predicament, why did they have to turn their backs on and point their blades towards their benefactors? The young Darus couldn’t agree.

“Well, whether you agree or not, my decision won’t change. If you don’t like it, then go to the Royal Capital yourself. I won’t stop you. The Fifth Army will capitulate to the Liberation Army, however, on the condition that we won’t participate in the attack on the Royal Capital.

“Oh I’ll do so, you piece of shit old man-!! I’m different from you and my elder brother, I’m just a fool!”

“Do as you like. But, don’t call yourself by the surname of Madros. Not just me, you’ll trouble everyone living in Madros. You’ll live as simply Darus, and you’ll die as simply Darus. You’re disinherited. Don’t show yourself before me again.”

“Hah, you don’t save to tell me, you rotten shits! I’ll show you my spirit-!”

He kicked open the door and went outside with squared shoulders. Kerry sent a signal with his eyes, and a senior bodyguard followed after him. Perhaps this could be called a final sign of parental love.

“……Now that the idiot has left, let’s restart the discussion. Immediately go and greet the Princess of the Liberation Army. Tell her we’ll release the prisoners. Take the fastest horse. The faster we go, the better the impression we’ll make.”

“Sir-!”

“But, tell her that we cannot participate in sieging the Royal Capital. We won’t surrender that far. If she says no, threaten her that we’ll fight against her. If this area becomes Empire dominion, that’ll also be to their detriment. There’s no need for us to excessively depreciate ourselves.”

If they sent soldiers to the Royal Capital and Madros became under-manned, the Imperial Army would once again draw close. The Liberation Army wouldn’t want this area to be occupied by the Empire either probably.

"Understood!"

"This discussion is over. Everyone return to your duties-!"

Proclaimed Kerry, and the military and civil officials saluted and stood up to leave. Kerry stared at the ceiling with a weary face, still seated.

"God, I didn't think they'd lose. If you'd won at Canaan, Yalder, we'd be able to see each other again. You really do have rotten luck…"

While he clicked his tongue, the face of that idiotic and heroic warrior floated in his mind.

(I must protect Madros. Just like you have your unyielding pride, I have Madros. I cannot have the people suffer for my selfishness. Yalder, sorry, but I cannot come aid you.)

"……..If only, I were a bit younger."

Kerry suppressed his own desires and endured. The Liberation Army had the momentum. He couldn't gamble now of all times. Yalder would fight until the end, and then he would probably die. That man was that kind of human. With his pride as a warrior in his chest, he would sacrifice himself for the Kingdom.
For the sake of Madros, Kerry had resigned himself to letting his comrades and friends die.

Tactician Diener of the Liberation Army went to the neutral City of Arte for a conference.
A vacant house on the outskirts with no signs of life.
Disguised operatives fortified the surroundings. Why they had chosen a place all the way out here, was because both parties were in positions where they had to conceal themselves.
Next to Diener was Vander under his direct control. He had been promoted to Major for his deeds at the previous battle. This young man who was walking well on the road to success could also probably be called Diener's right hand man. Knowledge, connections, the art of spy work, and also strategy and tactics were driven into him, and he was trained so he could work as Diener's assistant. Answering the expectations placed on him, Vander achieved splendid results.

"……It seems they have arrived."

"I see. Don't be discourteous. Our company is a man of a different 'standing' than us."

Muttered Diener with a sarcastic feeling. A person appeared from the back door wearing a black hood, his body covered.
The person's name, was Farzam, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom. So he could conduct negotiations with the Liberation Army who should've been his sworn enemy, he had directly visited this place. He had made a trip under the pretense of observing

the front lines of the Kingdom.
Several people in black clothes stood behind Farzam. They were an intelligence unit of the Prime Minister's proteges, and disposable pieces.

"…….Prime Minister of the Kingdom, Sir Farzam, or am I mistaken?"

"You're correct. I am Prime Minister Farzam. And would it be appropriate to take you as Sir Diener?"

"Indeed no doubt. What are you standing around for, please sit. Though, I cannot provide any hospitality in this kind of place."

Invited Diener, and Farzam took his seat vigilantly. If he snapped his fingers, that would be instructions to immediately cut Diener down.
Sensing the hostility, Vander put his hand on his sword's grip and got ready for battle. There were soldiers concealed above the ceiling. This situation would obviously happen since they were mutual enemies.

"By the way, is Princess Altura in good health?"

"……I never would have thought I'd hear those words out of your mouth, Sir Prime Minister. Was it not you who entrapped that lady's father and drove him to death?"

Asked Diener in an amazed tone at Farzam's shameless remark. The Prime Minister without at all any display of agitation exaggeratedly denied the claim, making a hurt expression.

"What an unhappy misunderstanding. I did nothing more than investigate into a likelihood. The one who doubted that person and exiled him was the late King. I did nothing. It hurts me that you've misunderstood."

"Fufu, as expected of Sir Prime Minister of the Kingdom, your tongue is quite glib. How many people have you driven to death with that skillful speech?"

"I only faithfully perform my own duties. Never would I harbor treachery. I swear upon the stars. There exists no human as upright and clean-handed as me."

Smoothly and fluently turned his tongue. How dare you prattle on like that, Diener was about to burst out, but he resisted. Entertaining monkey shows were needed even in a place like this, and he had to have the monkey dance for him as much as possible. Diener advanced the conversation.

"Well, let's leave it at that. Our greetings have deepened our friendship to this extent, so now let's move on to the main question."

"It seems Sir Tactician of the Liberation Army is busy. How different it is for those with momentum behind them, as I would expect."

"Haha, it is all thanks to you. My work is piling up like mountains, because the guys who ought to have done it originally hadn't you know. I don't even have time to sleep. It's so troubling."

While releasing killing intent, they both bared their teeth at each other. This was duel of words.

“Let’s not beat around the bush. There’s no need for excessive tedious talk. We of the the Yuze Kingdom would like to propose peace talks with the Royal Capital Liberation Army.

“…..oh?”

“His Majesty Kristoff wishes to hand over the throne to Princess Altura after an interim period of half a year. Afterwards, he would like to be promised a retirement in the north. His Majesty does not wish for any more useless fighting.”

Farzam held out a letter with the King’s seal on it. Of course, it was a forgery. There was no way Kristoff would accept such a plan.
But, Farzam intended seeing this through. He could save the King’s life and could also retain some political power. It was possible for him to take back his authority if he waited for an chance to. If he were the one doing it, it was possible. Farzam had confidence in himself. He couldn’t handle a spear, but he had made it to the top with his brains and speech.

“Hm. But, I could not possibly accept this. We already have our hands on the Royal Capital. There is no need for us to give you an extension of half a year after all this. What you can do, is promptly give us your unconditional surrender. That’s about it. Obediently surrender the Royal Capital and take your judgement like a man, how about it?”

Diener threw away the letter. He mustn’t show weakness in negotiations. Furthermore, the Liberation Army was in an overwhelmingly advantageous position. There wasn’t any reason to accept such a foolish policy.
In that case, why had Diener come to this meaningless negotiation table?

“I see. Certainly, your opinion is reasonable. But, if you don’t accept this proposal, we will resist in the Royal Capital to the last man. The people’s blood will flow, the Royal Capital will be destroyed, and who would like that outcome? Think about this carefully.”

Indeed. The problem was the Royal Capital. It was their target of liberation; they couldn’t destroy it. The Royal Capital becoming a place for a decisive battle would also make bringing in siege warfare a terrible idea. They couldn’t purposefully destroy the Kingdom’s greatest metropolis city that would later become their dwelling.
Moreover, they wouldn’t be able to avoid causing casualties among the Royal Capital’s populace. It would be terrible if the people’s resentment turned towards the Liberation Army. For the ‘righteous’ Liberation Army, they currently couldn’t allow any injury to befall the innocent people.
If they affected the current reign, the ones standing to gain would probably be the Empire and the Union. Especially the Empire, who would be wholeheartedly delighted surmising the chance to create a puppet regime. Under the name of assistance, they would possibly deploy soldiers to Royal Capital Blanca.

“You’ve struck where it hurts. This humble Diener has misread Sir Prime Minister. I apologize for my impoliteness.”

“What, I also care for the citizens of the Kingdom. This humble Farzam would give away his life for the Kingdom.”

Farzam had a seedy smile.

“I thank Sir Prime Minister for his kindness. Then, shall we compromise?”

“Those are the words I wished to hear the most. By all means, please allow me to hear your proposal.”

In response to him, Diener proposed a matter Farzam hadn’t expected.

“…….We… plan on capturing Cyrus and Sayeh afterwards. During that time, I would like Sir Prime Minister to keep a tight grip on the military and civil officials, and arrange to open the gates as soon as we arrive at the Royal Capital.”

“I can’t understand the meaning of what you’re saying; just what do you mean? We should’ve be discussing about peace. For me to do such an extreme act of disloyalty, why—-”

Farzam was bewildered, not understanding at all. Diener shrugged, and spun his tale indifferently to persuade him.

“It’s a simple matter. I want Sir Prime Minister to become a patriot hero. If you perform a bloodless surrender to save the Royal Capital’s people, everyone would praise you, Sir Prime Minister. And, if you persuade the King and he abdicates, your fame would be limitless no doubt about it. For such an esteemed person, we would have to prepare a corresponding rank.

“……”

Though he was masking it with pretty words, behind them importantly lay a demand for betrayal. He was saying to freeze the military while they were attacking the fortresses, to make the King abdicate, and to hurry up and surrender the Royal Capital. Change sides, and I will prepare for you suitable rank and fame, Diener was saying.

“Princess Altura who will succeed the throne and her fiance Prince Alan will one day produce a prince. He will be a star of hope, burdened with the next era of the Kingdom. His guardian, will be you, Sir Farzam. I request of you. You, who unites both good and evil, would surely be able to guide him.”

Diener took out a letter with Altura’s seal on it. It was all empty promises now, but this article had value that would one day bear fruit.

“……And you have proof that you’ll soundly keep that promise?”

“First of all, we’ve prepared the money to cover everything. Use it by all means, and work to avoid any futile bloodshed. Also, please take this.”

Vander opened a stuffed wooden box, and it was packed with an enormous quantity of gold coins. Money for the plan. Diener offered it to the Prime Minister.
And one more thing. An item which could be called his trump card. Carefully packaged, it was:

“T-this is-!”

"Yes. One of the holy relics handed down the royal family, the Mirror that only members of the Unicafe lineage are allowed to hold. I dedicate this as a substitute for proof. I think you understand that Princess Altura is of the same intention."

There were two holy relics of the Yuze Kingdom. The Sword in possession of Kristoff's Unimat family, and the other was the Mirror of Altura's Unicafe family. Their value couldn't be put in terms of gold, and they were practically national treasures.
The air left Farzam's lungs. It wasn't a counterfeit. He could tell just by looking at the etched characters. Farzam was a man who had come into contact with many high-class items and was experienced in appraisal.

"……I do understand. I will exhaust my body and endeavor to avoid useless fighting. For the sake of the people."

For the people–those words didn't match him at all. For his own gain, how many thousands, how many tens of thousands of peasants had been killed by him?
Vander was hard pressed to hold back his desire to kill. If he relaxed, it seemed like he would cut him down.

"I am in awe, Prime Minister. What magnanimous judgement. …….However, the instant troops from the Royal Capital reinforce the fortresses, this conversation would be as if it never happened. Please, I beg of you to understand."

"I know. But, it will take a month at the very least."

"Naturally I'm aware. We will be making a, very slow, attack. Please take your time to persuade everyone."

Negotiations ended. Farzam would abandon the fortresses for his own protection. He had no intention whatsoever of committing a double suicide with that fool Kristoff. If he could settle into the role of a guardian, there would be many chances to restore himself.
Deciding to forsake the current Kingdom, Farzam would exert his skill and contrive to take hold over the military and civil officials. This was something he was doing even now, and it would be extraordinarily easy.

Farzam left the private house behind. In it were Diener and Vander, who looked like he couldn't agree.

"Sir Diener. Why would you make such a promise? Not only that, to even present the Princess's heirloom, the Mirror."

"It's just a mirror. We can make as many as we want later. If we can obtain the Royal Capital with just gold and a drab mirror, I would call that phenomenal. Not a bad transaction."

"Nevertheless, you would be employing a parasite. That man is a fiend, the root cause behind the country's ruin."

"…….Vander, do you really think I'd pardon such a man? A brute even more foolish than that dog? I'll have that thing act as a clown until the Kingdom collapses. He'll surely dance madly for us. And then, in the end—-"

Diener gestured, cutting his own throat with his finger. Vander reflexively shuddered.

Diener intended on putting all the onus on King Kristoff and Prime Minister Farzam. And then, he would kill them before they could say anything out of place. He would probably assassinate them after they had expended their use. It was like the noose was already around their necks, just the people in question didn't notice.

"……You're a fearsome man."

"Vander, you've become one too. One man dirtied, ten killed, and thousands saved– that is the best course of action. There's no need to waver. We ought to take the initiative."

They would rebuild the Kingdom and save many thousands of people. For that sake, they would sacrifice many. What was bad about that?
While saving the country, Diener would carry out his own revenge. He himself had formerly been disposed of. He wanted them to taste hell.
Diener smiled inwardly. He had taken the alias Diener, stood as the Liberation Army's Tactician, and led them to victory. Using his connections in the intelligence unit he was formerly a part of, he tore apart Farzam's information network and took control. The Prime Minister had abused them until they died, never giving his agents 'the carrot.' The was no one who swore allegiance to the Prime Minister, and it had been simple to break them apart.

"It starts now. It all starts now. Vander, we go together. We'll perform a clean sweep and build a new age for the Kingdom. We will be the cornerstones; we must show them the way."

"Sir-, please use my power as you see fit."

Diener stood up, but he stopped moving. He remembered a discomforting worry.

"……I just remembered. Where has the rumored Death God run off to?"

"Sir-, according to reports from scouts, she headed for Cyrus Fortress."

"I see. I owe a debt to that thing from Belta. I'll make her know the severity of her committed sins. "

With a cruel smile on his face, he thought of the execution for the Death God.

"As soon as we return, send the soldiers to Cyrus and Sayeh. Send a messenger and offer a full report to Princess Altura. Sayeh Fortress will fall through force. As for Cyrus Fortress…"

Diener stopped his words there, and headed out of the house. Vander, confused, chased after him. The feeble-minded King, the clown Prime Minister, and the little girl who didn't know her place. He would kill all of them. Diener would see to it that all who hindered the Liberation Army he had built and poured his lifeblood into would die.
He couldn't hold back his smile, and he covered his lips with his hand. Glory was approaching before his very eyes. It was so close that he could reach it if he extended a hand.

Cyrus Fortress, Messroom.
The soldiers who were preparing for battle, after completing stage one, were resting. Katarina was in a corner of the noisy cafeteria, brush in hand, for the purpose of a daily routine. This was a job she had undertaken on a whim, and it had stuck with her ever since. Her feelings, her thoughts; fun things, sad thing–she wrote all of them down.
She heard people called this a diary, but Katarina didn't think so. She was carving proof of her existence.
Katarina didn't fear death, but she was terrified of being forgotten. Hence, she was etching her existence in this white-paged book.
After she died, someone would see this, and know that there was once a person known as Katarina.
The instant she thought of that "someone," Katarina's face scrunched. She couldn't control her emotions swirling with love and hate.
She pushed up her glasses and endured that overflowing something. The necromancer who had called her back to this hell, her step sister, and her innocent-looking step mother, who at the same time was her father's killer, had raised her–those two were special for Katarina. They were targets she ought to resent, and also humans she ought to thank.
And then, the final one she thought of, the one who had become a greater existence than those two, was her Lord, Schera, who she ought to serve. Of course, she had no resentment towards Schera. She was strongly captivated by Schera's almost severe way of life, and nothing more. And if Schera were to die, it could be nice if she could by Schera's side. She not only wanted to witness her way of life, but also her manner of death. Revered as a Hero, feared as Death–how would Schera meet her final moments? Was she mad for having such thoughts?
She exhaled, sighing, and looked up, and there was Schera peering at her, seemingly deeply interested.
Katarina involuntarily jumped up. She hadn't felt a presence at all.

"C, C, Colonel!?"

"Do you have a habit of shivering in the cafeteria? Or is that a ritual before meals I wonder. How interesting."

"T, that's not it! This is, that is…"

"I don't really mind. What you decide to do before eating is up to you. So, what actually are you doing?"

"……S, sir. I was, writing, this… diary."

It wasn't a diary, but when she went to explain, she couldn't respond in any other way besides that it was a diary.
Katarina hid the book so it wouldn't stand out. If Schera asked to see the contents, that would be bad in all sorts of ways. She touched her glasses, trying to deceive her. But, Schera didn't pursue it further.

"I see. I'm, pretty bad writing diaries. It seems hard, and also—-"

"…….And also?"

Katarina prompted Schera, who rarely decided to talk about herself.

"I don't like thinking about the past. Same with the future. I decided to think only about the present. Or perhaps I can only think about the present I wonder. That's why I'm bad with diaries."

Answered Schera while eating beans belonging to the deceased Konrad. Her expression was aloof from the world, and Katarina couldn't get a read on her emotions.

"…….Colonel, that—-"

Katarina searched for the following words. She didn't know what she should say.

"Well then, I'll be at the field. Contact me if something happens."

"Und-Understood!"

Interrupting Katarina's salute, Schera lightly waved her hand and departed from the dining hall.
Though they had come this far fighting together, Katarina barely understood Schera. She didn't know why Schera fought this far. She herself said that it was to eat and for revenge.
Then, why did she become so strong? What spurred Schera on to such lengths? It seemed she wouldn't be told even if she asked, but Katarina wanted to know one day, she thought.

"……They're growing day by day. I won't ever tire of just looking at them, and if I diligently take care of them, flowers will bloom I'm told. Ah, I'm really looking forward to it."

Just what kind of flowers would bloom? Small, white flowers she had heard, but was that true?
While watering them, Schera was taking care of the potatoes in a good mood.

Her fever hadn't gone down from that day for some reason. Her nausea wouldn't lessen. It was like something was trying to break free from the core of her body. That's what it felt like. And, the greatest problem was that her appetite wasn't very good, though she felt her stomach empty.
Despite being able to satiate herself with well water and Konrad's beans, her loss of appetite was a big problem. She tried wracking her brain, but since she couldn't think of anything good in particular, she decided to let it resolve itself. She couldn't do anything about it anyway.
Also, she was busy with various things. Visiting the stables, watching the soldiers, gazing at the field, Schera greatly enjoyed her life in Cyrus Fortress, her home.

Chapter 31: Two Meals a Day is Bad for the Body

While the Liberation Army's predominance strengthened day by day, a large scale reorganization was going on in Royal Capital Blanca.
Cutting to the chase, it started with Barbora, who had suffered defeat at the Battle of Bertusburg and lost Cannan.
The personnel reassignments were criticized for throwing the military into disorder, but Farzam firmly stifled the opposition.
Since it proved difficult to placate Barbora, who called for a final, all-in resistance, just throw him away, Farzam decided.
Borbon, who had put up a "good fight" at the previous battle, was inaugurated as the commandant of the First Army as Barbora's successor.
This man who couldn't make decisions on his own was an ideal figurehead. Also, Octavio, who was in the middle of his trial for war crimes, was freed from house confinement and recklessly instated as his assistant.
He was informed of Farzam's intentions and well understood his own purpose: his role was to observe Borbon and make sure he never made an offensive.
The dissenters like Barbora were reorganized into positions with no real power, and the weakening of the military proceeded favorably at Farzam's hands.
The urgent requests for reinforcements from Cyrus and Sayeh were dismissed, the defense of the Royal Capital was strengthened, and no soldiers were sent out, under the pretense of reorganization.

The season was early summer. Exactly a year had passed since the Liberation Army made an uprising at Salvador Fortress.
Altura began the final step to liberate the Royal Capital: the capture of Cyrus and Sayeh.
Diener and Fynn were given 50,000 to capture Cyrus Fortress, and 70,000 lead by Behrouz were mobilized to capture Sayeh.
The Liberation Army broke through Canaan's road without any difficulties, and they advanced while taking over the surrounding cities.
The garrison stationed in castles surrendered without a fight, and in truth they joined the Liberation Army. While showered by cheers from the people, the officers and men of the Liberation Army flooded into the Royal Capital Area.
Without anything that could even be called resistance, the Liberation Army successfully surrounded completely both fortresses.

A request for surrender reached General Yalder defending Sayeh with 10,000 soldiers via a letter tied to an arrow.
—-"I guarantee the lives of the garrison if you surrender. Immediately open the gates and throw down your swords."
Exasperated, Yalder had rejected it. Negotiations for surrender broke down before they had even begun.
From the next day onwards, the Liberation Army of 70,000 began the siege.
Yalder ascended the ramparts and took command on the front lines. Preserving morale was more important than anything else in a siege.

“Don’t let the towers approach! Pour oil on those guys sticking to the gates and shoot them with fire arrows!”
“Sir-!”
“Sayeh is a mighty fortress! Show them that we can defend even if they send 100,000!”

The approaching siege towers were vehemently pelted by projectiles from catapults installed on the castle walls and destroyed, and those attempting to break down the gates with a battering ram were doused with boiling oil.
In the mountainous area of Sayeh, the Liberation Army’s catapults were hindered.

“Archers aim-! Target, the enemy battering ram at the main gate! Fire-!”
“Die-!”

The Liberation Army soldiers, bearing shields, could withstand attacks from atop the ramparts, but they couldn’t deal with the fire.
Poor soldiers fired upon by fire arrows writhed like mad and became corpses in front of the castle gates.

Sidamo in charge of defense in the back was preparing for the enemy’s tunnel warfare. The soil on their north side was weak, and it was the most suitable area to dig under the castle walls.
He predicted their route beforehand and constructed water-filled moats there in advance, ready to hinder the enemy’s excavation with them. The instant the enemies dug through, the water would rush onto them, and the soldiers wouldn’t be able to do anything except drown inside the tunnels.

“The enemy will definitely plot a surprise attack. The concentrated attack on the front gate is to deceive our eyes.Their real target is our rear.”

Sidamo himself had also joined in the digging work, constructing moats together with the soldiers.
His moats would bear fruit three days later. As Sidamo had surmised, the Liberation Army dug forth their tunnels, and he succeeded in making them sacrifice a great many of their engineers.

“Yo Sidamo. At this rate, if reinforcements from the Royal Capital arrive, we’ll prevail in defending Sayeh. The morale of the solders is also high.”

“Sir-. The soldiers are doing well. As of now, the siege force have not gotten close at all.”

Like Yalder had said, the morale of the Sayeh defense garrison was high. Before cooping themselves in the castle, Yalder had told only those who had the resolve to stay.
The soldiers remaining were the defeated soldiers of the Third and Fourth Armies, as well as those who had many chances to leave. Despite all that, they chose to fight to the end with Yalder.

Sayeh was a fortress carefully planned to be held by 10,000 men, and around it was a region of steep mountains. This was an advantageous position for the defending side.

"Barbora will probably finish reorganizing the Army Corps soon. While they conduct this attack, they'll have to start being vigilant for an attack from the Royal Capital. Then it'll be our turn to strike."

When Barbora had appointed Yalder as the defense commander, he had declared, "I'll definitely come back and bring reinforcements."
These two who had a bitter relationship let their past grudges be like water under the bridge–they exchanged a firm handshake and vowed to meet again. They could understand each other, ironically, because now they were both generals who had suffered defeat.

"Though our supplies may be limited, we have enough to hold out until the First Army arrives."

The Sayeh Garrison wasn't informed that Barbora had already been dismissed.
Their faith that reinforcements would come, would surely never be answered.
Both fortresses were only there to buy time until Farzam could convince those in power in the Kingdom. It didn't matter to him that they could only endure for a month.
They were sacrificed pieces, but they, who were fighting and risking their lives on the brink, had no way of knowing.

"Haha, I'm blessed with great soldiers so late in the war. It's an honor fighting together with them."

"Your Excellency, there will be more fighting hereon. The rebel army is not entirely unified. If we can buy time here, an opportunity will present itself without fail."

"Umu. From tomorrow onward, we'll go all out! Colonel Schera's probably struggling at Cyrus about now. We can't fall behind ha!"

Even after two weeks, Sayeh showed no signs of falling at all.
The Liberation Army commander Behrouz had failed his plan for a tunnel, and his siege towers had also sustained great damage. The assault on the castle gates had also gone unfavorably, and the casualties were increasing.
Behrouz was a general skilled in field warfare, but he lacked experience in sieges. He had strong leadership, but he could only conduct sieges by the books: fill in the moat, fire arrows from all sides, break through the gate or ramparts with catapult support, and if the ground allowed tunneling, build a tunnel underground and break into the castle.
What should one do if none of them worked? The answer wasn't written in military texts.
Behrouz had launched a fierce attack regardless of day or night, but that all-together backfired, creating a mountain of corpses. A feeling of war-weariness was spreading through the soldiers, and morale was dropping.

"……This is bad. Yalder and the Kingdom's soldiers are quite competent. Our attacks are being pushed back admirably. Our catapults are few, and our siege towers were destroyed; we can only force through the gates perhaps."

The soldiers attempting to forcibly enter the fortress through ladders were doused with boiling water or blazing oil, and they were dropping, dying.
Was it really okay to let this continue? Behrouz anguished.

"Your Excellency.You mustn't be impatient. I understand your enthusiasm to take down the castle quickly for the sake of the people, but the losses of soldiers will only increase at this rate. It is also important to wait and watch."

Behrouz nodded at the Staff Officer's words and ruminated on himself. He had gotten too used to victorious battles, and he had begun to overestimate himself. He had believed that the Kingdom's Army was entirely full of frail soldiers.
The other officers and soldiers were sure to have the same belief, the groundless confidence that the enemy would easily fall with just a slight push.
That they ought to liberate the Royal Capital as soon as possible, this idea had consumed him.

"……How unlike me. What have I learned after living so long. Chief Staff Officer, thank you for your criticism. You're right that temporarily taking a wait-and-see approach is best. We've overcome many hardships to come here, what need is there to be impatient now of all times? We'll prepare an endless amount of catapults and siege towers, and only good things await us if we attack composedly."

"Sir, that is exactly right. I will immediately begin the arrangements. It will take time, but we will be able to confidently take down the fortress. No matter how courageous the enemy General Yalder is, he cannot replenish his soldiers. Starting tomorrow, let us surround and contain them with only arrows fired. That will force the enemy to exhaustion."

"Umu. Give the directive at once. Especially in times like this, we mustn't rush."

It was a bold decision to withdraw the plan for an all-out offensive despite having over seven times the enemy's numbers. He would inevitably be criticized for his incompetency. Any other general would have decided to capture the fortress though force.
That he could accept his staff officer's criticism and decide to change the plan was one of Behrouz's virtues.

—-The Liberation Army force to capture Sayeh ceased fighting two weeks into the siege.

The force sent to besiege Cyrus, the Liberation Army commanded by Diener on the other hand, had not fired even a single arrow during these two weeks.
This man only did one thing: thoroughly surround Cyrus.
Not just the engineers, even scouts were not an exception. All officers and men were invested into constructing this encirclement posthaste. Palisades were erected, trenches were dug, and fences to guard against horses stretched all around.
Braziers brilliantly illuminated the night, showing the enemy no gap for a night raid whatsoever. Patrols were frequently sent out with no slip in their surveillance of the enemy fortress.

They requested surrender only once before the siege, and they didn't plan to accept surrender at all afterwards. The reason being that if they did, their food expenditure would increase, since they would need to imprison the soldiers.
Diener's plan of attack was plain and simple. Complete starvation. They bought as many goods as they could from the area around Cyrus beforehand, and after surrounding the fortress, they would guard against enemy escape.
According to reports from spies, Cyrus lacked provisions. This fortress only just built hadn't been stocked with food. How long they could hold out was up to the commander in charge of defense.

"Sir Diener, the encirclement is flawless. Not even a rat could get out now."

"Ahh, everything is going well. Now we just wait for time to pass."

"Good for us that General Larus is a careful man. The most dangerous time to be attacked was while we were weaving our web."

Larus was a man who fought a prudent and calm battle, but at the same time that was a flaw.
Since he was uneasy about his lack of soldiers, he forbade any combat until reinforcements from the Royal Capital came.
During that time, the Liberation Army had completed their encirclement. Had it been the belligerent Barbora, he wouldn't have idly let them scurry around.
That didn't mean it was right to launch an attack, but the end result was that the fortress was completely blockaded.

"The Kingdom's Army number roughly 7,000, a bit too low to be launching an attack. A cautious person would probably never make a gamble like that."

"And with this, it seems that Death God is also nearing her end."

"Indeed. I'll have her taste a hell-like hunger. One month by my estimates. I'll enjoy seeing her after that heh."

The corners of Diener's lips raised, and he smiled. He had heard the Death God had quite an appetite. It was already too late for her to wield her excellence. This encirclement couldn't be broken through.
Him taking the starvation plan was all in consideration for her. He thought it an appropriate execution method for Death.

"Will you not be accepting surrender?"

"Of course not. I won't approve of surrender after all we've been through. They'll starve, they'll grieve, and they'll suffer; then they'll die, their hearts full of regret. I'm thinking of all our comrades who've been killed by her. Show no mercy to those who come out of the fortress, no matter who they may be. Shoot them to death."

"U, understood."

Said Vander, feeling horror innerly. Diener's face had shown a hint of madness. War drives men to insanity.
Vander had only now experienced that firsthand.

“Your Excellency. Regarding the food rations, as per orders, directives to conserve have been given.”

Came reporting a Staff Officer. Larus had ordered given meals to be reduced to two a day, and furthermore, their quantities diminished.
Two weeks had passed since Cyrus Fortress was surrounded, and general Larus in charge defense had an expression of impatience.
This fortress was manned by 5,000 soldiers of the First Army and 2,000 of Schera’s Cavalry.
It was only just built and stout, but the take-in of supplies had been completely too late. Supplies hadn’t been sent in coincidentally with completion because sending supplies to a place like this would be diverting them from the front lines.
But now that Canaan had fallen, that had backfired.
It wasn’t that Larus hadn’t considered going out for an attack. He had entertained the thought of doing so to hinder the enemy’s maneuvering.
But, the enemy’s force was a large army of 50,000. Despite Schera’s excellence in battle, he couldn’t guarantee her safe return. If in the off chance that the “Death God” Schera was killed, morale would probably reach rock bottom.
Hence Larus had restrained from an attack. He didn’t think he had erred. Even now, he believed that firmly devoting themselves to defense was the best course of action.

“The First Army has probably finished their reorganization. His Excellency Barbora is a short-tempered man. He may already be on the way.”

“Yes, if we can hold out until then, it’ll be possible to repulse the enemy, I believe. The soldiers are also saying we will manage as long as Colonel Schera is here.”

“Mhm. But, that doesn’t rule out the possibility of the enemy switching to an assault. Tell the soldiers not to be negligent in their vigilance.

“Understood.”

Larus gazed outside the castle from his upper-story window. The Liberation Army flags stood everywhere, as if engulfing Cyrus.

Schera and her cavalry had nothing to do except keep lookout in this siege.
Since Larus had ordered them not to pointlessly waste their stamina, they could only continue to stay on alert, endlessly.
For Schera, this wasn’t a point of concern at all, and her daily routine was endeavouring to take care of the field.
Watching her in amazement, was someone who had broken through by force before the siege, Captain Darus Madros.

“Yo, Colonel Schera. Is fumbling with the field fun?”

“Yeah. It’s really fun. They’re growing little by little. I can’t get enough of watching.”

Mumbled Schera while uprooting weeds. Katarina was watering.

“These look like Wealth potatoes. You’ve got some bad tastes. Some say they’re disgusting and inedible.”

Darus said in disdain. He couldn't imagine himself deliberately wanting to eat potatoes native to the hated Wealth. He had tried them once, and like he had expected, they were disgusting.
The idiots of Wealth must've gotten their screwed up personalities after eating these disgusting things, Dallas thought to himself.

"They aren't. They're grown here, so they're potatoes of Cyrus. Right, I'll call them Cyrus potatoes."

"That's just splitting hairs."

"Captain, don't you think you're being a bit too cheeky towards the Colonel?"

Irritated, Katarina wrinkled her brows and advised him to contain himself. Rank was absolute in an army. Even if he was a man from the Madros family for example, his disrespect couldn't be overlooked.

"I was born with a dirty mouth. Besides, I came here to help uninvited. I ain't scared of anything now."

"I wonder if you've gone crazy, coming here by yourself to throw your life away."

The words Schera muttered with no ill-intentions struck a nerve. This woman who didn't appear to be intelligent thought him even more a fool.

"……Call it a sense of duty. I've come to repay the debt from Madros. Also, it's not set in stone that we're going to die. Soldiers from the Royal Capital are gonna come, and we'll live to fight another day."

"……Perhaps."

Schera plucked off a bug clinging to a stalk and threw it away.
Her condition had improved, but her meals had diminished to twice a day, and their portions had also decreased. The snacks she kept with her were nearly finished. Katarina's candies were now at a countable number.
Schera's mood was getting gloomier, and the cavalrymen too weren't faring well she felt.

"Oh yeah, hey Colonel. I heard this from the cavalry. They say the remaining feed is in pretty bad straits."

Said Darus as if he just remembered, and Katarina's face stiffened.

"Is that true, Katarina?"

"Y, yes. We've more or less not enough."

"Isn't grass… growing inside this fortress?"

"There's nothing but weeds coming up now," said Darus as he pointed out the sparse vegetation.

"What should we do, I wonder."

Schera pondered. There were weeds growing here and there, but not enough to support all the horses. Going out was prohibited too.

"……Can you, please leave it to me? I can take the best course of action."

"What do you plan to do?"

"Please leave everything to me."

Vaguely said Katarina, not backing down. It was better if Schera didn't know.
Darus lowered his eyes.

"I got it. I'll entrust everything to you, First Lieutenant. Please take care of the horses."

Schera smiled, and patted her hands, removing the dirt.

"Sir, understood."

After assuring themselves that Schera was going back to her office, Darus apologized to Katarina.

"……My bad. Seems I've said too much."

"It's fine. She would've found out sooner or later."

"So, what d'you intend to do? Let them go?"

"Like I'll hand over our warhorses to the enemy. There's also no need to risk opening the gates."

"But there's no feed right? Whatcha gonna do then?"

"……It's better if you don't know."

"Woah there…"

Katarina ignored Darus, and headed to the cavalrymen waiting on alert. She had to get their cooperation.
What she had to do was simple. They had to cull the numbers until they could hold out for two more weeks with the feed that they had.
Two weeks had already passed since the start of the siege. Reinforcements should be coming after half a month, Katarina estimated.
They should first kill five hundred from among the little less than two thousand warhorses they had. If that proved not enough, their numbers would be further thinned out.
The resulting meat would be used for food. It would be cruel, but necessary. This was war.

"……"

Katarina stood still for a moment, and looked up at the sky.
She was a fallen heretic who manipulated corpses. She didn't care if she was ridiculed

after all she had done.
But, the only thing she didn’t want, was to be hated by Schera. She feared losing Schera’s faith.
Schera had come to be strangely attached to horses, which is why it hurt her to mention this plan. She didn’t want Schera to know.
The cavalry treated their horses with much care, because horses were one’s own partner obviously. Katarina also loved and had given a name to hers.
They would start culling from the already weakened horses. They would go in order of physique, and Katarina’s horse wouldn’t be excluded.
Katarina took off her glasses, wiped the area around her eyes once, and then began walking again.

—-A month passed since the siege started. Reinforcements still hadn’t come.

Chapter 32: Water Soup is Tasteless

The long awaited reinforcements had arrived, for the Liberation Army force that had refrained from attacking Sayeh.
Large numbers of catapults and siege towers had been completed by the Liberation Army who had been working at top speed with the cooperation of the local cities.
The people had also cooperated full-force in transport work, and an obviously excessive amount of one thousand catapults and one hundred siege towers were deployed.
Commander Behrouz had ordered the entire army to start the attack again.
Regardless of day or night, arrows and stones incessantly continued to shower the fortress.
The stones that would be used for ammunition were soaked in oil and fired after igniting them.
The defending side couldn't cope, and they were being exhaustively crushed.
After three days and three nights of attacking, the Liberation Army advanced their siege towers up to the fortress walls and began to rain down arrows from above.

The Kingdom's archers atop the ramparts had nowhere to hide. They desperately continued resisting regardless, but they were falling one by one due to being easy targets.

And, the garrison defending the main gate were also in a predicament.

"Don't let them break through! Defend the gates to the death! Until reinforcements from the Royal Capital come, we'll endure somehow!"

"Ou-!"

"Pour down the oil! Burn them all down!"

The main gate garrison shoved their bodies against the gates, tenaciously putting up a resistance. They kept on fighting with what little energy they had left.
The Liberation Army's battering rams struck the gates, and each time, the force sent the soldiers pushing their bodies against the gates flying.
The garrison above the gates poured down large volumes of hot oil and were shooting fire arrows at the approaching Liberation Army.
The battering ram burst into vigorous flames, but even so, the offensive continued.
More and more enemies were coming.
The Liberation Army soldiers climbed over the corpses, and took hold of the battering ram.

—-And then,

A fierce blow from the blazing battering ram broke down Sayeh Fortress's weakest spot.
The main gate garrison commander resolved himself, unsheathed his sword, and gave his final orders.

"Here they come! Everyone draw your swords-, Long Live the Kingdom's Army! Long Live His Excellency Yalder!"

“Long Live The Kingdom! Long Live Yalder!”

“All hands attack! After me-!”

The Kingdom’s soldiers with their spear line instantly at the ready skewered those of the Liberation Army first to arrive.
They used those bodies as a shield against the Liberation Army forces coming in swarms.
The Kingdom’s soldiers were crushed, trampled, and slaughtered all without a chance to even scream.

As if infesting the fortress, the Liberation Army soldiers invaded inside, killing every guard they met.
There was no justice nor righteousness; merely swarms of beasts drunk on madness and seething with mindless desire to kill.

The guards fought well. They fought very well. But, they were outnumbered. Force of numbers was overwhelming them.
The infirmary housing the wounded was sealed off and then set fire to, and everyone inside burned to death.
Everyone in the fortress was massacred with no regard to combatant or noncombatant. The Liberation Army soldiers weeded out everyone still breathing, and gleefully gave them the finishing blow.
Behrouz hadn’t given such orders, but all the pent up dissatisfaction, misery, and hatred were all turned towards the soldiers of the Kingdom, and the commanders couldn’t stop it. If they tried to clumsily stop it, they were likely to be killed in retaliation. They couldn’t intervene.

Secluded in Sayeh’s highest tower, Yalder took off his helmet and quietly steadied his breathing.
His face had a great number of wounds, and his armor was also partially destroyed. Pain coursed through him when he moved his body. One of his bones may be broken. His hair was disheveled, and his facial hair had grown as it pleased. The edge of his trusty sword was chipped and had become useless.

“……So in the end, reinforcements didn’t come. What a shame. Barbora probably has his own circumstances. I would’ve liked to have a nice, slow chat with him once. It seems I won’t have that opportunity.”

Yalder gave a bitter smile in resignation. He could hear the sounds of intense fighting from outside. The guards were probably buying the final bits of time. He felt admiration from the bottom of his heart towards their loyalty.
Behind Yalder flew the flags of Kingdom, the Third Army, and the Fourth Army. Battle played out under those flags, welcoming the soldiers’ final moments. He gazed at them, deeply emotional.

“This is my guess, but Sir Prime Minister may have colluded with the enemy. Thinking of it that way, it follows that reinforcements would not have come. Sir Barbora was probably imprisoned, or killed.”

Muttered Sidamo while adjusting his uniform disarranged through work. Even he, a

staff officer, had exhausted his energy in desperation, fighting up to their final moments. And now, he had was beginning their final preparations.

"So even the Prime Minister, the highest civil official, has forsaken the Kingdom? There's probably nothing more we can do then."

"……."

"Hey Sidamo. It's not too late. You have something you must do right? You don't have to keep me company. Disguise yourself again and escape."

Yalder didn't know how many times he had tried persuading Sidamo. Sidamo dearly wished to restore the fallen house of Arte.
Knowing that, Yalder had been telling him to hurry and escape. Sidamo had stayed with him up until now; he had done enough.

"So you say, but Your Excellency cannot start up *those* alone. They require magical power."

"You can use magic?"

Yalder asked with an expression that said he was hearing this for the first time.

"I only have it, but I cannot use it. Though something like activating those won't pose a problem."

He had capacity for sorcery, but he wasn't blessed with talent as a sorceror. Hence, Sidamo had arduously exerted himself and acquired his rank of Staff Officer with his knowledge.

"This is your last chance. Run away Sidamo. Live, and carry out your long-cherished desire."

"I must refuse. I too have some backbone. I cannot shamelessly live on while letting my leader die in battle. Discussing this anymore is wasting both our times."

"Damn you're a stubborn man. ……Well, that's quite like you I guess. Fine then, do as you please."

"Sir. I intended to anyway."

The corners of Sidamo's lips raised ever so slightly. Yalder smiled.

"I regret that I couldn't keep my promise with Colonel Schera. What a shame, yeah, truly a shame."

"Sir, Schera too certainly thinks it a shame."

"Hmph, I'll have to apologize one day. I hope she forgives me."

"If you bring some good food, she won't have a problem. Schera is that kind of person."

"I guess so. When that time comes, I must keep my promise—-"

From outside the high tower resonated cheers. It appeared that all the guards had been annihilated. The door to the tower was broken down, and they rushed inside.
It would probably only be a matter of time until they closed in on their room.
Yalder nodded, and Sidamo hid himself. He prepared *those* next to him. He would activate them at Yalder's signal.
The sounds of countless military boots surged towards them, and the double doors were mightily kicked open.

"Found you, General of the Kingdom, Yalder! Your head is mine!"

The Liberation Army soldiers surrounded Yalder, the points of their weapons pointed towards him, and they began ridiculing him.

"Your Kingdom is done for! Now accept your just deserts!"
"What a pathetic man. For this prestigious General to be killed by simple soldiers!"

"Silence! I may be washed-up, but I, Yalder, will never hand over my head to the likes of you-!"

Glaring at the sneering soldiers of the Liberation Army, Yalder unsheathed his chipped sword.
Momentarily lost for words at Yalder's spirit, the soldiers' faces turned red in rage.

"You've quite the mouth for a beaten dog! We'll kill you!"
"A General's head! As much reward as we want!"
"Hehe-, it's mine!"

The Liberation Army soldiers rushed at Yalder with their spears forward.
Slashing down several small fry, Yalder's abdomen was pierced by many spears.
Pulling out the spear tips, he stumbled backwards. The enemy soldiers stepped over the corpses and closed the distance.
After smashing the head of the lead man, Yalder finally made his decision.

While coughing up blood, Yalder roared with all the air in his lungs. He would not hand over his head to these soldiers.

"—-Long Live, The Yuze Kingdom-!"

Yalder cut his own throat with his sword. Losing strength, he collapsed to his knees.

"He's saved us the trouble!"
"Shithead! I'll chop him up!"

Catching his corpse, the soldiers bared their teeth in ridicule. They all rushed at Yalder's corpse.
After witnessing his friend's final moments, Sidamo chanted the ignition spell for the Sorcery Mines taken from the Liberation Army.
Those that had misfired at the previous battle were recovered from the oxcarts and brought to Sayeh.
They were placed in the four corners of the castle room. The excited Liberation Army soldiers hadn't noticed, but large quantities of gunpowder and oil were scattered around.
When Sidamo reached the final line of the incantation, the figures of his deceased older brother and foolish older sister floated in the back of his mind.

And for some reason, Schera's detestable face came to mind too. To think of Death of all things in his final moments–Sidamo couldn't hold back a wry smile.
But, he didn't hate her way of living. Free and unrestrained, her appearance as she lived willfully; perhaps he was envious. He wasn't really sure.

(Thankfully, I still have some time. Let's follow Death's example and think more selfishly. …….Older brother, I'll be leaving this world. Farewell, older sister.)

The instant Sidamo finished chanting the spell, blinding light surged from the Sorcery Mines.
The expanding blast burned everyone in the area to nothing, wiping them out without a trace. The flames set the oil on fire, and the gunpowder exacerbated the force, and the entire tower was caught up in the explosion.

The Sorcery Mines that had started Yalder's days of agony, now brought about their end.

And so Sayeh fell, and the surviving soldiers of the Kingdom's Third and Fourth Armies were utterly wiped out. Yalder, Sidamo, and the garrison of all ten thousand soldiers under them died in battle.
All that was left were the resounding cheers and cries of the victorious Liberation Army.

However, the face of Behrouz who had achieved victory was grim.

(…….Isn't this… nothing more than using the people's wrath for our own devices? There's no guarantee, that the blade of their anger won't be pointed towards us one day.)

Behrouz closed his eyes and brushed away his thoughts. They were in the right. It was true that the Kingdom had ruled over the people in tyranny. Justice was on their side to free the people.
—-Indeed, that was why they were in the right. They just had to not repeat the same mistakes. Humans learn from history. They would walk the honest path.
Along with the staff officers celebrating their victory, Behrouz entered inside the fortress.
Corpses of the Kingdom's soldiers, corpses burned to death, corpses crushed to death, corpses dismembered, everywhere.
The old general Behrouz… continued to walk onwards, in this world of hell built under the name of Justice.

When dark smoke rose from Sayeh Fortress, the Liberation Army soldiers surrounding Cyrus Fortress thundered in cheers.
At the same time it was to show delight, it was also to make those inside the fortress taste despair. —-You are next, it signified.
A month had already passed since the siege started. It wouldn't be strange if the fortress had already exhausted their provisions.

Diener studied the Kingdom's soldiers standing on the ramparts with a spyglass. Their cheeks were sunken, and their complexions were severely poor. Their bodies staggered, and they could barely stand.
But, they were still living. It was still too early to attack. Even if they attacked with force and felled the fortress, that would be too lenient.
The Death God had to taste even more unbearable hunger. Once she went mad from hunger, he would kill her.
Lowering the spyglass, Diener ordered Vander standing next to him.

"Kill them. I told you I won't accept surrender."

"Are you sure? They're holding a white flag."

"I don't care. Tell the soldiers it's likely a fake surrender. Death had eaten at the Imperial Army and destroyed them with that tactic. We will not make the same mistake as them."

"Understood. Messenger, convey the orders to shoot down the enemy soldiers!"

"Sir-!"

The messenger on his horse left headquarters. Several minutes later, the soldiers of the Kingdom holding a white flag were doused with arrows, and they died.
He wouldn't let anyone escape from Cyrus Fortress. With a thin smile on his face, Diener went back to his pavilion.

—-Cyrus Fortress.
Confirming the black smoke and knowing Sayeh had fallen, Larus decided it was time to surrender. He couldn't make the soldiers go along with his selfishness.
But, the envoys were shot down before they managed to reach the enemy camp. It seems the enemy intended on killing everyone in this fortress.
Emaciated himself, Larus worked over a plan for hereafter.
Reinforcements hadn't come yet. They probably wouldn't come no matter how long they held out, he feared. If Barbora was still in command, they should have arrived a long time ago.
That they hadn't meant that something had happened in the Royal Capital. There was a high chance that Barbora was dismissed.
He didn't know what the Prime Minister was thinking, but what Larus understood now was only that the Prime Minister would let this fortress fall.
In that case, there was no meaning in confining themselves like this. They were just wasting their stamina.

However, it was too late to launch an attack. The enemy's preparations were perfect. There was only death if they opened the gates and made a determined assault.
Two choices remained for Larus. There was no choice for surrender.
Would they stick it out inside the castle until the very end and die from hunger, or would they raid the enemy's formation and proudly die in battle?
Larus slapped his desk. There were many things he could've done if he knew that they were going to be abandoned from the onset.
Guerrilla warfare with concealed soldiers and using Cyrus Fortress as a decoy. Mobile

raids, taking advantage of the mobility of Schera's unit. They could've slowed the Liberation Army's advance by interfering with their supply line.
Yet, he had chosen to enter their deathbeds, where they had to spend every day in worry of remaining provisions.
Larus lamented his own caution and passivity. He needed a little more time, until he could make his final decision.

In her hazy consciousness, Schera sat in front of the fields with several of her cavalry. A cavalryman was propping up Schera from behind, for those occasions when she would sometimes lose consciousness.
If humans subsisted only on water, it would take generally two or three months to die of starvation. Of course, every person was different.
With her healthy appetite, the extent of Schera's debility was more severe than the other soldiers, and one could tell she was in trouble from a glance.
Her cheeks were caved in, and it had become difficult to satisfactorily move. But, she could still fight. Schera grasped the scythe next to her tightly.
Now that a month had passed since the start of the siege, meals were reduced to once a day, and those meals were also in a miserable state.
Next to Schera was a plate. A scrap of bread about the size of a pebble quietly sat on it.
A large amount of liquid was poured into a bowl. An ingredient-less soup. It wasn't a soup as thin as water; it was water.
More accurately, water flavored with a little salt. She thought could hear a chef's cries of anguish.
Schera picked up the scrap of bread with trembling hands. She gently carried it into her mouth, and slowly chewed, taking her time. Once it couldn't be tasted, and once it couldn't be chewed any more, she swallowed, her throat making a noise.

"Delicious…"

Schera's cheeks slightly relaxed. The cavalrymen couldn't watch anymore, and they spoke up.

"Colonel, please, take ours—-"

"I don't need it."

She strongly refused the extended bread. She detested taking her companions' food.
She took a sip of salt water, and spit it out.
This wasn't food. It was just water. Schera tiredly leaned on a cavalryman.

"Colonel, I beg you, please eat. You need the nutrition more than us. Please."

"No."

"Colonel!"

"I don't want it. I'd rather die. I'll never eat it."

Schera unyieldingly refused her subordinates' proposal. She would only eat the portion allotted to her.
As a high ranking officer, Schera should have been distributed more than the noncommisioned officers, but she only ate an equal amount as her cavalry.
She couldn't eat more by herself, much less take away another's tiny portion.
Anything but that. Anything but doing the same things as the rebel army. Those guys were vermin who took from them while saying they were fighting for the people.

"……I hope they… quickly grow… and become edible."

The crops in front of her hadn't borne fruit yet. She wondered when they would.
While propped against one of her cavalry, Schera longingly stared at them.

—-Katarina made up her mind, seeing this scene.

That night. Katarina waited for the soldiers keeping watch to fall asleep, and she decided to go outside the fortress.
She would use magic to leap down from the ramparts and slip into the enemy camp using what little she knew about concealment.
Her targets were the supply convoys. Schera should accept eating food stolen from the rebel army.
At this rate, Schera would die of malnourishment.
Even if they started killing all their warhorses and using their meat for food, Katarina too probably wouldn't eat them.
What a joke it would be if "Death" died from starvation. Katarina hadn't stayed beside Schera to witness her die like that.
She would never accept such a death.

Katarina prepared her equipment, and examined the environment surrounding the ramparts, when,

"Yo. Who're you eloping with this late at night? Or are you star-gazing?"

There was a man's throaty voice. Katarina scowled, and the man waved his hand in greeting.
It was the stupid man who had come from Madros, Darus Madros.

"……Just a whim of mine. Leave me alone."

"Wasn't rank absolute in an army?"

"And didn't you yourself ignore that? So I'll be doing the same."

"I hear yah. Heh, what a strong-willed woman."

Darus took out a hip flask and held it to his mouth. Its contents were water of course.

"Do you need something?"

Katarina touched her glasses, vigilant.

“Nn, not really. I just thought there was a suspicious human shadow passing by. That’s all. I ain’t gonna stop whatever you’re gonna do. I came here in a similar fashion after all.”

“I see. I’ll be going then. For the Colonel, I’ll definitely plunder some food.”

“That so? Well, take care. Even if you’re unlucky, we’ll be able to meet before long. The only difference is sooner or later. I’ll explain to the Colonel when the time comes, so don’t worry.”

Knowing it was futile to stop her, Darus shrugged his shoulders and was about to leave. Katarina spoke to his back.

“If, just if, I don’t make it back, take care of the Colonel. She won’t fare well without an adjutant I’m sure.”

“Woah woah, gimme a break. I almost got my head chopped off by the Colonel. That ain’t a joke.”

A laugh burst out of Katarina, seeing Darus putting his hand on his neck.

“That’s fine then. I knew there was no one more fit to the duty than me.”

“Exactly. So yeah, be careful. Also, that pink ribbon doesn’t look good on you at all.

Muttered Darus, giving Katarina’s pink ribbon a glance and leaving.

“……None of your business.”

Katarina took out her cane and loaded it with magical energy.
She strengthened her legs for the descent, and she intended on using a rope ladder on the way back. She had to leave a minimum amount of magic power. It would be difficult no matter how she played it out, but she had no choice but to do it.

(…….I should have learned more magic besides necromancy for times like this. Too late now though.)

She took a deep breath, opened her eyes, and sallied forth from Cyrus Fortress.

—-First Lieutenant Katarina Nubes disappeared from that night onward and would never return to Cyrus Fortress alive.

Chapter 33: I'm Done Eating

Schera received word that Katarina had died in battle. Her ashen face crumbled, and she felt violently nauseous.
She kneeled, and her vomit mixed with blood splashed on the floor. It was all stomach acid.
Darus, who had reported to her, rubbed her tiny back.

"H, hey. You okay?"

"Yeah, I just feel a little bad. I'll get better immediately."

"……My bad, I should've stopped her, by force if necessary. It's my fault."

"You're fine. Katarina had her reasons. That's all."

"B, but…"

"We can meet again one day. My cavalry… is always together."

Brushing away the hand of Darus who tried to catch her, Schera began heading back to her own room.
A cavalryman supported her body, and she slowly began walking forward.
She could no longer walk by herself, yet even so, her scythe didn't separate from her back.
She couldn't fight without it.
Having entered her room, Schera leaned against the window, and then slid down to the floor.
Then she slowly closed her eyes. She was tired, very tired. She didn't want to move.
Her stomach was empty, but she felt no hunger. Paradoxically, she didn't want to eat anything.
She felt like even if there was a feast in front of her, her stomach wouldn't take it.

"……I wonder why… I'm reminded of… that old village. I… hate that place."

Schera opened her eyes, and the world was blurry.
Her dreary office only for a moment flashed with the scene of her burning village.

A black shadow clad in tattered robes piercingly overlooked the feeble Schera. It peered at Schera from a distance, waiting for its chance.

—-It wasn't time yet.

One week after the fall of Sayeh. When two months had passed since the start of the siege, defending commander Larus made the heartrending decision.

—-Notification to all soldiers in Cyrus from Larus.
At the same time as dawn breaks, all soldiers will sortie from the fortress, charge into

enemy headquarters, and take the head of the rebel army general.
However, this is not mandatory. Those who object to the decree are permitted to remain in the fortress.
It has been an honor to have been able to fight together up until this day. Gentlemen, I give my heartfelt thanks for your loyalty and bravery.

Larus couldn't bear having his soldiers suffer the horror known as starving to death. Then there was no other way. Valiantly, they would break into enemy camp and meet their final moments as warriors.
What happened to those who remained in the fortress was up to the commander of the Liberation Army. Larus expected them to all be killed. Had their adversaries any mercy, they would've accepted the earlier surrender.

"……I can't believe that I of all people would've chosen to attack and die an honorable death. This kind of end is more suited towards Barbora; it's beyond me."

Schera gathered her cavalry, and they had their last supper together.
Other units had similarly decided to take a meal, and there were many who had grieving faces, but Schera's group was different.
There was no meaning in meals if they didn't enjoy it. Even if it was tasteless alone, together with friends, it became more delicious than ever.

Today's luxurious menu was the following:
So delicious it makes one's jaw drop, the famous, the reputed, bread. As it was of such excessive preciousness, only a piece of it could be prepared.
And, purified soup of such crystalline clarity that it might even be mistaken for water. It seemed there was a spoonful of salt sprinkled in to bring out its subtle flavors.

"A masterpiece that reflects the work of a skilled chef," quietly said Schera with a straight face, and the cavalrymen had smiles on their faces. Going along with them, Schera too had a smile. Darus too had a wry smile.
Since they had come to Cyrus, it was the most fun, and most delicious dinner she ever had. She would probably never forget it for the rest of her life.
Schera somehow felt her body become lighter. She felt great right now.
The black, ominous shadow was receding.

Of the Cyrus garrison, five thousand volunteered to participate in the attack.
Those who chose to remain in the fortress and meet their ends were those who couldn't move, and those who clung to their last ray of hope, surrender.
Of Schera's two thousand cavalry, a thousand were mounted, and nine hundred would follow on foot.
The one hundred rest asked to stay and defend. They were those who suffered grievous wounds at the previous battle and hadn't recovered yet. They were incapable of participating in the assault.

"I can't leave you all behind. I'll stay home and fight to the last with you."

Said Schera wearing her black armor, propping herself up on a cavalryman's shoulder, and a soldier who aspired to defend in their absence shook his head sideways while smiling.

"I am grateful for the sentiments, but I must refuse. Staff Officer Sidamo said it best right? 'Cavalry must die outside.' Promises must be kept, right, Colonel?"

The other soldiers who would also remain opened their mouths to agree.
Honestly, they all wanted to die fighting together with Schera. But, they were without their horses, and being unable to move as they wished, they were nothing more than a burden.
In that case, they would assume a different duty.

"……"

"What, your worry is unneeded. Colonel Schera's Cavalry is invincible. We will watch over you from over here, waiting for the day you come meet us again. Forever."

"That's right, never will we be defeated. Moreover, we have to take care of the potatoes we grew together."

"Once they bear fruit, the war will surely have ended. When that time comes, I'll show you my skill, and make a delicious stew. Please look forward to it."

"…….I understand. I'll definitely come for you. We'll have a delicious feast then, together. I promise."

Schera smiled, and the soldiers enthusiastically nodded.

"Salute the Colonel!"
"May the fortunes of war be with you!"

"You all as well, take care. Let us meet again, for sure."

"Sir-!"

The one hundred staying in the fortress chose not to defend the gates, but to protect their dear field. Nothing would've happened anyway if their small force defended the gates.
Hence, they wanted to fight at their treasured place. They had to freedom to choose their deathbeds at least.
Not for the Kingdom, but for Schera, thought the remaining cavalrymen unanimously.

As if encroaching upon the evening darkness, the sky was becoming white.
Addressing the soldiers assembled at the main gates, Larus raised his voice, his face grim, as he gave his order. Grim, from the bitterness that he had to order them to die, but he concealed the fact.

"Gentlemen, I give my deepest thanks for staying with me until today. We'll show the rebel army, the spirit of the Cyrus garrison. We'll make them know, the valor of the

Kingdom’s elite. Without Fail, We’ll Hold Up The Commander’s Head-!”

“OU-!”

“Alright, open the gates-! Death shall be our herald! Escort Colonel Schera into enemy headquarters!”

“Long Live the Kingdom! Long Live the First Army!”

“All units begin the assault-! Forward-! Forwards-!”

“UOOOOOOOOOO-!”

The drawbridge was lowered, and the gates opened.
Larus charged as the vanguard, and the soldiers spurred on their horses after him.
The strategy was all too simple. Larus and the infantry would break down the surrounding fences, palisades, and trenches, and then stop any reinforcements until they died. Schera’s unit would climb over their corpses and drive into enemy headquarters.

—-Without any expectations to return alive.

Every man of Schera’s Cavalry raised their spears, and readied to charge.
Schera glanced over each of them, and nodded just once.

“We’ll kill as many of the rebel scum as we can lay hands on. I will fight, until I can fight no longer. So stay with me. Thank you for everything. It has truly been a pleasure eating with you all. I’m eternally grateful.”

“It has been an honor to be with you Colonel.”
“Colonel, thank you very much!”

“Long Live Sir Schera!”
“Long Live Colonel Schera!”

“Alright. Let’s go. ……Raise the flags-! Schera’s Cavalry will begin the charge! Kill them all-!”

“Begin the charge! Follow the Colonel!”

Schera mustered her strength and galloped her horse. Darus shouted, and the cavalry followed, the sounds of their hoofbeats resounding.
Black flags passed through the gates, and white baneful crows sailed out into the open field–to bring death to the Liberation Army, to take even one more man down with them.

—-The Cyrus garrison and Schera’s Cavalry began the assault.

Sensing the attack of the Kingdom’s Army, Diener concentrated soldiers in front of

headquarters, and ordered them to utilize the built defenses to annihilate them.
He planned to kill all of them and not let them break through. He wouldn't let even a single man escape.

"The enemy is already weakened. Stay calm and snipe them. Shoot them down and kill everyone."

"Sir Diener, preparations are complete."

"Good, commence the capture of Cyrus. Take no prisoners; murder them all."

"Sir-!"

The messenger left. Now that the garrison's main force had sortied, Cyrus Fortress was near empty. It would fall immediately from an onslaught of 30,000.

With this time's starvation tactics, he was able to keep the losses of soldiers to an absolute minimum. The siege turned out perfectly.
It would be all too simple to drive away the enemy's thoughtless attack. They had built a firm line of defense.
Death's cavalry wouldn't be able to make it. The only thing awaiting them was a wretched death.

(Well, even if they stayed inside the fortress, they would only be heading towards their deaths from a hellish hunger. In fact, we might be considered messiahs for liberating them from their misery. Kukuh, a messiah that saves Death, oh how it makes me laugh.)

With the most heartfelt laughter, Diener took out his spyglass. The deaths of the Kingdom's fools–this had the makings of the ultimate comedy.

After Schera and the others sortied, like swarming ants over prey, the Liberation Army surged into Cyrus Fortress.
Those that decided to meet their ends here desperately guarded the gates, but they were broken through without any difficulty.
There was no longer any need for battering rams. The Liberation Army clung to the gates, and forcibly broke it down with iron sledgehammers.
The weakened soldiers were overrun by the Liberation Army with plenty of ardour, and they were mercilessly killed.
For the attacking soldiers of the Liberation Army, there were few chances left to make a name for themselves. To be recognized for their valor in battle, they had to thoroughly slaughter everyone.
This wasn't a battlefield, just a simple hunting ground.
There was no accepting surrender. There was no need to listen to game begging for their lives.
The soldiers who threw down their swords and surrendered were kicked and impaled with spears. Their heads were stabbed countless times by swords.
Same for the wounded. Taking prisoners was unnecessary. In accordance with Diener's instructions, they slayed all, leaving not one remaining.

Amidst all that, there was a group of soldiers that resolutely fought to the end. They differed from the soldiers of the Kingdom who ran around trying to escape like scattering baby spiders. In the fortress's courtyard, the one hundred took a square formation and boldly continued resisting.
Before them lay the dead bodies of Liberation Army soldiers, and right now with ferocious smiles on their faces they were pulling out their spears from freshly killed flesh.

"Hahaha. They've no mettle. Their numbers are great, but after all they're just gathered trash."

"Were the Colonel here, they'd have died in less than a minute."

"We alone are enough."

"We should take as many as we can with us. Let's kill even one man more."

They, Schera's Cavalry, surrounded the field in a square formation, and in the center of them stood their battleflag.
The Liberation Army soldiers around them hesitated in stepping forward.
That flag was Death's symbol. They would be distinguished if they took it down, but they didn't want to die when they had already won.
Those rash for merit that had energetically gone in for the kill had already become pieces of meat.
The fortress had largely been suppressed, but only this courtyard continued tenaciously resisting. Even if they suffered wounds, or their numbers dwindled, Schera's Calvary would never let them approach the field.
Death's soldiers feared no one. (Note: Again, "Death's soldiers" with the additional connotation as in those resolved to die.)
Losing his temper, a commander of the Liberation Army appeared, bringing along crossbowmen. Since he didn't think he'd have to use them in a suppression, it had taken time to prepare.
It was a disgrace that they hadn't been able to crush them with overwhelming numbers of soldiers. They barely had any strength left in them moreover.

"You've fought well for soldiers of the Kingdom. I'll praise you. But, this is as far as you go. —-Crossbowmen, formations."

Per the commander's order, the crossbowmen formed three ranks, and took aim.
The cavalrymen prepared their spears, ready for their time.

"Long Live Colonel Schera! Victory for the Colonel!"

The cavalrymen chanted in unison, and the commander swung down his sword.
The crossbowmen pulled the trigger, and fired. Then a second volley. And a third volley. The first rank reloaded.
Schera's Cavalry silently collapsed. Some stabbed their spears in the ground, refusing to topple.

"These guys will move until the very, very end. Keep on shooting. No need for reserve."

The commander who had heard of the cavalry's abominableness from Diener and Fynn

made sure to not get close. He kept a distance and kept on shooting.
The cavalrymen's bodies were treated like dummies used for shooting practice, and the crossbowmen sneered as they shot their bolts.
After several hundred fired bolts, there was no one alive.
Their bodies were like comical hedgehogs. The Liberation Army soldiers laughed.

"These idiots made us waste time. And all for what."

Muttered the commander, detestably looking at the corpses of the cavalrymen.
One soldier read the signboard, and spoke up.

"Your Excellency! It seems this strange garden is the Death God's. Her signature is on it, and it says not to damage it!"

"Ridiculous. They persevered here just to protect a garden? What the heck were they thinking? The deeds of madmen are difficult to understand."

The commander spat out in ill-humor.

"All for Colonel Schera? Ain't they gone crazy?"
"These Wealth potatoes? They died for potatoes!"

One soldier uprooted one of the crops buried in the field like he was touching something filthy. Then he crushed it vehemently underfoot.

"Well whatever. If these're so important, we'll bury them together. They're abominable soldiers of the Death God; we don't want them resurrecting on us."

"Understood!"
"Heheh, we'll burn 'em all! Get out of the way!"

The soldiers of the Liberation Army kicked the corpses of the cavalry as they collected them in one spot.
Schera's so-carefully-raised field of Wealth potatoes was tragically devastated.
They tore the crops to pieces in jest with their swords, dug up the field entirely with their spears, and trampled on the dirt a countless, unfathomable number of times with their boots.
They lathered oil on top the dead bodies, and set fire to them along with the wreckages of the crops.

"Alright, go raise our flag atop this fortress. Let the tactician know of our victory.

"Understood!"

"Damn, finally onward to the Royal Capital. It's been awhile."

The infantry followed the commander and began climbing up a tower.
Behind them were a blazing mountain of corpses and the burnt ruins of the field.

Liberation Army Headquarters. Diener doubted his eyes at the situation progressing before his eyes.
Impede the enemy with a line of defenses and annihilate them with stationed archers.
It should have been so simple.
But, what was this scene unfolding before him. He couldn't understand at all.

"W, Why. Why can't they be stopped!?"

The Kingdom's Army were filling up the trenches with corpses, destroying the fences, and getting rid of the palisides, all while withstanding the arrows.
All during that, the soldiers were killing in the hundreds.
He had received news that the enemy general Larus had already died. Wasn't it strange they hadn't lost the will to fight?

"Sir Diener, the enemy are like cornered rats. With their escape routes completely blocked, they can only fight."

"Shut up! Send more soldiers to the front! They mustn't be allowed to approach!"

"U, understood!"

Constructing the blockade, eliminating all routes of escape, that was all Diener. It was also he who had ignored their surrender and decided to crush all of them.
The surviving infantry of the enemy crashed into his ally's vanguard. Behind them were cavalry hoisting a black flag and kicking up a cloud of dust.
They prioritized not victory, but the death and suffering of their sworn enemy, and the blood of his Liberation Army comrades was pointlessly being spilled.
Diener regretted his decision, but it was too late.
Death's soldiers plunged forward, aiming for his headquarters, creating more sacrifices all the while.
The Liberation Army tried to attack them from all sides, but the enemy cavalry's momentum didn't slow.

"Shit-! At this rate-"

"Sir Diener! The Lion's Cavalry! Fynn's cavalry has come!"

"W, what!"

Just when Diener started thinking about evacuating from headquarters, cavalry flying the flag of the Lion mowed down Death's soldiers.

The infantry of the Kingdom's Army boring into their formation was halted.
The soldiers who kept on determinedly advancing, infallible in their impetus, once stopped, were fragile.

"Sir Diener!"
"I know! Don't miss this chance, link up with Fynn's unit and crush them all at once!

Diener suddenly stood up and gave his directive.

Heroically swinging his spear, capitalising on their mobility, and beating down the Kingdom's Army was Fynn and his Lion's Cavalry.
The enemy's morale was certainly high, but their movements were dull. It seemed they couldn't keep up with cavalry's keen movements.
Starvation had doubtlessly sapped away their stamina. Fynn cut off the head of a Kingdom's soldier.

"Colonel! The Death God is in front of us-! Death's Cavalry is rushing forward!"

Yelled Adjutant Milla while swinging her sword. Death's Cavalry was dashing in a straight line, following the road the infantry of the Kingdom had opened for them.
In front was Schera. She was showering in large volumes of bloodspray. Her shoulders heaved with her breathing as she spurred on her horse.

"So Death comes last after all. They should've been weakened considerably by starvation. I won't lose this time."

"Colonel!"

"What, I'm not going alone. This is a fight to the death. Come with me; don't hold back."

"Sir-!"

"Here we go! We'll kill the Death God and make a name for ourselves! Let them know the strength of the Lion's Cavalry!"

Ordered Fynn, and the cavalry began charging in compliance.
Fynn's reputation was already clearly unshakeable, but if he killed Schera here, it could be said he'd reach the pinnacle of renown.
Dangling before his eyes was fame and glory. He couldn't let this chance escape.
4,000 infantry of the Kingdom's Army had at last exhausted their stamina it seemed, and their force was weakening.
He should isolate all of them and reliably crush them afterwards. The enemy was surrounded by a force ten times their number. There was no defeat from the onset.

The Lion's Cavalry collided with Death's Cavalry.
Fynn decided to aim for Schera, and he tightened his grip on his spear. One blow when they passed each other. He intended to end it there.
Schera was holding her scythe to the side horizontally with both hands. Its blade was smeared with blood, and it was harvesting the souls of many.

"Death God Schera! Your head is mine!"

"……"

Suddenly, Schera threw her scythe high up in front of her. The moment he looked up, promptly, two sickles sprouted from both of Fynn's shoulders.
Schera had thrown two small sickles from her waist.

"—-W, what."

"I don't have time to play with you. My goal is only the Supreme Commander's head."

Without looking towards Fynn who collapsed in intense pain, Schera dashed forward with her one thousand cavalry.
Having fallen from his horse, Fynn was caked with dirty mud kicked up by the horses. He screamed as he writhed, smearing himself with dirt.
Until Milla noticed and rushed over to him, he was tormented by endless pain.

Catching her thrown scythe, Schera once again grasped the reins.
With Fynn's Lion's Cavalry broken through, Schera advanced towards headquarters, the enemy general's flag fluttering above it, while breaking down the defensive fences.
To hold back the enemy hot on her heels, cavalrymen of their own volition decided to stop and turned around.
Schera only went forward, forward, and forwards. Those following her were Darus with a little more than two hundred riders. The others gave themselves unto death and went to disrupt the enemy's formation.

"—-Haah-, Haah-."

"Almost there Colonel! That's shitface Diener's flag!"

"Unfortunate, that it's not Altura."

"Now's not the time to be greedy! It's a miracle we even made it this far!"

"There's no such thing as miracles. Only hatred and determination."

She swung her scythe while gritting her teeth. She wouldn't be able to move soon. There wasn't much time left.
Brushing away the downpouring arrows, Schera charged forwards.
A sharp, angular faced young man relatively young entered her line of sight. Different from the other soldiers, he was wearing an unwrinkled uniform.
His teeth were clenched so hard that blood flowed from his lips. It seemed he was extremely enraged.
She thought to throw a sickle, but she had used the last of them on that lion guy earlier.
Whatever. It was probably better to gouge out his head with her scythe. Schera held her scythe aloft.
One last blow. She had one last blow in her. Her final prey would be this shitface. She would kill him without fail.
Her cavalry behind her dwindled in numbers while she continued on. Just a little more. Just a little more.
Just several seconds away from her sworn enemy's head, just one more step away.

"—-Crossbowmen, Fire!"

At the same time a familiar voice shouted out, several bolts pierced Schera's body. Schera felt like she would fall off her horse from the impact. She gripped the reins

and endured.
Her world swerved. When she checked the voice's owner, it was the traitor Vander.
Schera let out a smile seeing his nostalgic face.

Ahhh, how nostalgic Belta Castle was. Katarina, Sidamo, Yalder. There were so many interesting humans. David, Konrad, Darus. There were so many strange humans. Diener, Vander, Octavio. There were tons of loathsome humans.
So many things had happened. In this one year, there had really been so many things.
She was tired.
Blood violently spilled from her mouth, and Schera lay forward on her horse. Even so, she didn't let go of her scythe.

"The Death God's been hit! Take its head!"

Said Vander, and the infantry flooded forward. More bolts were fired for cover.
Her cavalry stood in front of her, their arms spread out wide as they died protecting her.
Darus took the reins from the collapsed Schera and strongly pulled.

"Hang in there! Hey-!"

"……Is this… the end… I wonder."

"Retard! Not yet-! We haven't taken that fucker's head yet!"

"But… I'm a bit… tired."

"Shut up! I don't want to hear Death whining! Hey you, take the Colonel and escape! Use everything you got and run away somewhere-!"

"B, but."

A young rider was confused at Darus's order.
He was ready to die; why did he have to run away? He couldn't understand. He couldn't abandon his comrades and run away.

"It'll annoy those guys! If she gets away, that shithead is gonna get pissed. C'mon, get a move on! Don't turn back-!"

"Un, Understood!"

Picking up Schera's body, the young rider retreated. Several riders followed after to guard him.
Darus had a thin smile, and he turned around. He had found a nice place to die. His damn father probably wouldn't complain either if he died protecting a woman. This was the best.

"Heh-, this is the end! Schera, this is for you!"

Darus and the surviving cavalry squeezed out the last of their strength and charged. They drove onwards into the group of crossbowmen, and they fought hard despite being hailed by arrows. They were almost like evil fiends.
They honestly fought hard. To buy time until Schera could escape, they laid waste to

Diener's headquarters.
One man killed tens. Actually, even more, and every single man fought like the greatest knights from history.
In the end, they were pulled down from their horses by a herd of maddened soldiers, their limbs crucified, and all members died while laughing maniacally.
Darus too, not as a man of Madros, but as simply Darus, died fighting.

With the enemy annihilated, the Liberation Army headquarters was finally regaining its composure.
Freed from the impending fear of Death before him, Diener ran his trembling hand through his hair.

"……What, is this."

Diener looked over his half-destroyed camp.
In front of him were the corpses of Liberation Army soldiers.Their dead faces were of grief.
When he looked at the dead bodies of Death's riders, they all died with ridiculing smiles, feeling satisfied. Their faces were like scoffing at Diener's clumsiness.
Vander approached and spoke up.

"……Sir Diener. Are you injured?"

"What just happened!? Was I done in by the Death God again!?"

"Please calm down. Death was repelled. It is your victory."

"Does this look like victory to you!? I intended to exhaust them by starvation and curb pointless sacrifices, but what is this sorry state!?"

"……"

"I, I… Why, why didn't I prepare a route of escape. Why did I turn all of the enemy into Death's soldiers. Have I become conceited unawares?"

7,000 of Cyrus's garrison was surrounded by 50,000 and starved. But due to the enemy's assault this time, likely over 7,000 had become casualties.
Due to Diener's blunder in judgement, needless sacrifices were paid. He had pointlessly driven the enemy into a corner, and they had all changed into Death's soldiers.

It was an iron-clad rule that one way of escape must be provided to the enemy in a siege. Hence he had arranged for an escape route at Belta.
Leave a mere sliver of hope for the living–to guard against the enemy from hardening their resolve and fighting to the death. He should have known this. He couldn't be any more regretful.
He had toyed with life, and this was the compensation for his derision. —-What if he had accepted surrender at that time.

Diener collapsed forward. Nowhere did he look like a victor.
Had it been his former self, he wouldn't have made this kind of decision. For the Liberation Army's victory, he should have erased all of his enmity. The Liberation Army was his everything.
When had he changed? When had his hatred for Death surpassed the lives of his comrades?
Diener agonized at his transformation. But, even so, his hatred for Death wasn't disappearing.

"Sir Diener. Schera still hasn't died. Your permission to pursue. I will kill her, and pay tribute to our comrades."

Death was still living. That piercing killing intent from earlier flitted across the back of his mind. His back broke out in goosebumps from his fear towards death.

"……Kill her. No matter the costs. Vander, you must kill her. That thing, cannot be left living. You have to kill her!"

Cried Diener with hollow eyes. His constant calm and collectedness, his composed demeanor, was completely gone.

"Leave it to me."

Vander took his troops and began pursuit. They raced in the direction Schera had escaped.

A small forest region west of Cyrus. Schera and the young rider had escape there.
There were no signs of the other riders. All members had lured the enemy, acting as a diversion, and died in battle.
The young soldier propped Schera against a large tree and commenced treatment of her injuries. Her horse had ceased functioning awhile ago, as it had been pushed past its limits and was overused.
From here on, they had to escape on foot.
He carefully pulled out the bolts sticking out of her, took off her armor, and stopped the bleeding one hole at a time. When her barren skin entered his vision, the rider averted his eyes.

"……You've done enough. The bolts were… dipped in poison it seems. Here is… far enough."

Schera murmured in a feeble voice. The crossbow bolts had been coated in a deadly poison.
It was a fatal weapon the men had prepared against Death.
The poison rapidly ate into Schera's body. Her little remaining stamina would soon be exhausted, like a candle about to be extinguished.

"……I cannot do that."

"This is an order. Rank in an army is absolute. You've done enough… leave. I'm… fine here."

She tried to grip her scythe, but no strength entered her hands. She couldn't move anymore.
The young rider had a resigned expression on his face after some trepidation, and then he lightly smiled.

"If you die, you won't become hungry anymore, Colonel. The dead don't feel hunger after all."

Mischievously muttered the young soldier, and Schera curiously gazed at him. Those words, when and where had she heard them before? Somewhere, sometime ago.

"……You're?"

"I promised to treat you to bread and cheese remember? There's no cheese, but I do have bread. Here."

The young rider pushed a tiny, a truly tiny, crumb of bread into Schera's mouth, and he stood up.
The bread was damp with blood, but Schera thought it delicious.

The surroundings became noisy. It seemed their broken horse was discovered.
The enemy would come here soon. The young rider unsheathed his sword and stood in front of Schera.
A commander of the Liberation Army appeared, pushing through the thickets. In his hand was gripped a naked blade glittering with a dangerous light.

"I've finally found you. Hey you, I'll let you go if you escape now. Out of the way."

"I refuse! I will fight until my end! There's no defeat for Schera's Cavalry!"

"I see. Then I won't say anything futile. Die."

The Liberation Army commander and the young rider clashed. Swords crossed, and a battle to the death unfolded.
The young rider had the advantage in enthusiasm, but he was overwhelmingly outclassed in technique, talent, and experience.
After exchanging ten-some blows, the young rider was cut down.
He reached out his hand in Schera's direction as he died. The Youth who was saved by Death, died protecting Death.

The Liberation Army commander clenched his sword dripping with fresh blood, and he approached Schera.
The man's name was Vander. The human formerly Schera's adjutant.

"It's been awhile, Major. Or rather, you're a Colonel now right?"

"……Second Lieutenant Vander."

"Nope, I've also been promoted. I'm now a Major. I've finally caught up to you from back then."

Vander sheathed his sword and looked down at Schera. Her breathing was as faint as an insect's. Even if he didn't do anything, she would probably die. The poison bolts had unfailingly gotten through to Death.

"……"

"I… harbored fear towards you at that time, and I threw myself into the Liberation Army. However, everywhere I went was the same in the end. There's no such thing as a 'clean' army. To understand that only at this age, I guess I'm also a hopeless human being."

Vander told in self-mockery. Having belonged to both armies, he had seen more than enough filth. Diener was the human who bore all of that filth, and Vander under his direct supervision had now also been dirtied.

"……"

"The reason why you became the Death God–I finally know now, why you hold such animosity towards the Liberation Army. ……The ones who destroyed your birthplace, were us, the Liberation Army. I was told by Diener. This world is honestly disgusting. There's no justice anywhere."

"……I see, so it was Diener."

Murmured Schera, as if engraving it onto herself. She would never forget. Kill, she would absolutely kill him.

"Yeah. One dirtied, ten sacrificed, and a thousand saved. This is an inevitability. Someone has to do it. If no one acts, tens of thousands of humans will die at the hands of idiotic politicians. I've made the decision to dirty myself. So—-"

Vander picked up Schera's large scythe next to her. Contrary to its appearance, it was light. It strangely fit in his hands, like he had always been using it.

"—-I will kill you. "Death's" existence isn't needed in the new world. You've killed too many, done too much."

Vander placed the scythe's blade against Schera's neck. Schera didn't resist.
In Schera's blurry world, Vander appeared distorted.
Something which she had a memory of, from somewhere, from sometime, possessed Vander–a black shadow.
Schera turned her eyes towards his neck, and his tender-looking throat. Schera's appetite began welling up from somewhere. A little bit of strength returned to her. Her eyes began glinting with a dark light.

"I'll at least make it painless, and give you an easy death. Colonel Schera, ……this is farewell!"

The instant Vander held the scythe over his head, Schera sprung up from the ground. Vander was stunned at a person on the verge of death suddenly moving. The scythe fell from his hands.
Schera's soft, thin arms lovingly wrapped around Vander's neck.
Schera whispered only one word, her warm breath coincidentally caressing his ear.

“—-Delicious.”

Chapter 34: Second Helpings

—-Report to Altura
The Liberation Army force sent to Cyrus has successfully captured the fortress. The enemy general Larus and Death God Schera were killed.
Also, during the confusion, Major Vander has gone missing.
End of transmission.

In the Chronicles of the Liberation War, Schera was said to have died in this battle. She abandoned her subordinates and devised to escape alone, whereupon she was surrounded by militiamen, and in the end, was torn limb from limb.
It was said that Altura mourned Schera's bloodstained life, and she erected a tombstone in Cyrus.
That the tombstone was nameless was proof of the weight of Schera's sins.
Until the fear of "Death" would vanish from the people's memories, there would be no forgiveness for her—-and with this sentence, the story can come to a close.

The Liberation Army that had captured Cyrus and Sayeh marched towards their ultimate goal,
Royal Capital Blanca, with Altura in tow.
With complete control over the court, Farzam had in essence staged a coup d'etat and confined King Kristoff. The Royal Capital Blanca surrendered without resistance.
On which occasion, Barbora committed suicide. He was appalled that he couldn't keep his promise with Yalder, and he ended his life. Barbora, who had pursued promotions and had his ambitions granted exactly as he desired, in his final moments, was deprived of his power and died without anyone to care for him.
The Liberation Army was welcomed amidst whole-hearted cheers from the capital's citizens. There was no one who called them the rebel army. Everyone ushered them

in, brimming with the feeling of liberation.
The Kingdom was forsaken by the citizens at their very own doorstep. The streets teemed with cheers welcoming heroes.

“We have been waiting for you, Princess Altura. We vassals all present swear our allegiance.”

Bringing along his personal retainers, Farzam greeted Altura’s company.
Diener coldly stared at him, and ordered for the man in front of him to be restrained.

“Arrest the wicked retainer Farzam and his gang. He’s the culprit behind the misgovernment. There’s no need to listen to his excuses.”

“W, this is different from what we agreed on! Diener!”

“Did you think only you would be forgiven after all you’ve done? Your sins deserve a thousand deaths.”

“D, don’t screw around! Do you know what’ll happen if you kill me-!? Princess! Do you mean to drag this country into another war!?”

Deciding that speaking with Diener was useless, Farzam looked to Altura, his expression desperate.
Altura glared at Farzam, and said,

“General Borbon and General Octavio weren’t like you; we have exchanged messages that say they would work with us. Same with the dignitaries of the Royal Capital. Thanks to your unsightly desire for self-protection, we were able to avoid shedding unnecessary blood. For that, I thank you.”

“You, you planned on using me from the start!?”

“It’s the deceived fault for being deceived. Wasn’t that the very ideal which you acted upon? General Octavio, please restrain this fool at once.”

Apathetically threw out Diener, and Octavio put his hand on his sword.

“Leave it to me. Prime Minister Farzam, you’ve prepared yourself?”

“O, Octavio, you bastard, have you forgotten who helped you!?”

“I’m not sure what you mean. I’ve only sworn loyalty to Princess Altura, the rightful successor to the throne. What reason could I have to be scorned by a ‘rebel’ who wielded tyranny? None.”

Octavio snickered. While Farzam had been buying time, Diener iconically had been advancing his schemes in the Kingdom’s Army.
Farzam was nothing more than clown manipulated by one man.
This man who had crawled up by using other people collapsed. Armed Liberation Army soldiers crowded around him.

“Your crimes for driving several tens of thousands of civilians to their deaths will never be forgiven. Prime Minister Farzam. Until judgement day, repent your own doings.”

“T, this won’t be forgiven! Octavio! Diener! One day, you will become just like me! Remember this-! And you Altura, don’t think you can live in your pretty fantasies forever-!”

“……What are you talking about?”

Altura had a dubious expression on her face, and Farzam slandered more, losing his temper.

“You probably don’t know all the things your soldiers have done under the name of Justice-! You foolish little girl——”

“Guards! Take this man away-! Don’t let him tell anymore lies!”

Diener ordered the guards, butting in, and Farzam was dragged away.

“Sir-! Come along-!”

“Sh, Shit-! I’m the Prime Minister! The Prime Minister I’ll have you know!”

Not a single man stood up for Farzam, and only death awaited this man who was abandoned even by his own direct followers.
Before carrying out his execution, Diener next to his ear revealed everything about his identity to the bawling, struggling Farzam.
Who he was, why he deceived him, and why he had to die.
Farzam’s eyes opened wide in shock, and he looked hard at the man who had once been his subordinate and had now taken the name of Diener.
In his daze, Farzam was put to the guillotine, and executed.
For the man who had risen up to Prime Minister from a simple page, it was too quick an end considering his selfish use of authority.

As for King Kristoff, he stayed silent, saying nothing, and he awaited his judgement day without any resistance.
Despite being in a position that ought to have governed the country, he hadn’t concerned himself with politics, oppressed the people, and was convicted as a criminal who killed several tens of thousands of people.
It was impossible for his verdict to be anything other than death.
Two weeks after the Royal Capital’s liberation, Kristoff was publicly put to the guillotine, and he passed away together with his infamy.
It was also the moment Diener’s revenge was complete.
Having treated him, a man who worked his body to the bone as part of their spy network, as a disposable piece and throwing him away, were Farzam and Kristoff.
In the name of Justice, Diener had admirably slain these two evil sinners.
After the King’s execution, the Royal Capital broke out into a large-scale celebratory festival. It was the advent of a new age–a future overflowing with hope. Everyone’s eyes were glittering, and they all had grand smiles. It proclaimed the end of their days of suffering, and that the war was over. All that was left was to rebuild.

The First Imperial Prince Alexander Keyland who had become hostage was released.
Afterwards, due to the efforts of Alan, a peace treaty was signed.
The Kingdom would change. Under their beautiful hope, Altura, the Kingdom would be

newly reborn.
It was the birth of Queen Altura and the New Yuze Kingdom.
The whole Kingdom was greatly excited, and they celebrated the birth of the New Kingdom and their new Queen.

New Yuze Kingdom, History Compilation Room.
By Diener's order, this established department was given the duty of accurately conveying the New Kingdom's rise for future generations.
Aiming for a Kingdom which would last even a thousand years, Diener had to properly leave a record of the Liberation War. He gave instructions for all the events from their uprising to the Royal Capital's liberation to be put together as "The Chronicles of the Liberation War."
In the Compilation Room, the chief secretary was hollering at an aged, obstinate man. He wanted his own personal opinion put in, so he was making the man do some retouching.

"How many times are you going to make me say it. I told you not to write down your own opinions. Correct every passage that I've marked."

"Chief Secretary. I have been writing down the correct history. There are no errors."

"Whether or not it's correct is up to me to decide. All you have to do is write down the 'Truth.'"

"Then there is no need for amendment. I have not written any fabrications."

"For the Death God, everything besides that she was a female officer should be left unclear. Unnecessary matters like she was a girl born in a farming village doesn't need to be written."

"But that is fact. I have found that in documents and have also conducted interviews."

"You fool. All the leaders of the Kingdom fought only in their self-interests. We don't have to leave a record of anything else. You should describe in detail how marvelous the leaders of the Liberation Army fought instead."

"That would be too one-sided. I don't approve of the necessity of these amendments. There's no point in records if they aren't compiled from a neutral standpoint."

The Chief Secretary brought up another passage he demanded be revised: [The Liberation Army aimed for the opening created by the skirmish between the Kingdom and the Empire and made an armed uprising in Salvador Fortress.]

"This is false. The Liberation Army was desperately begged by the people, and revolted reluctantly. They didn't exercise armed might for personal desires. Don't be mistaken."

"The truth is the truth. Furthermore, about the Tenang Rebellion, the actual event is still unclear. We have to investigate the details more."

Stated the old Secretary, and the Chief let out that it wasn't required.

“The actual happenings are clear. It’s evident that the thieving commander of Belta at that time, David, gave the instructions for it. There are plenty of witnesses too”

“There is no precise evidence that David gave the instructions for it.”

“What’s for sure is that there were victims and that the soldiers of the Kingdom committed the massacre. There’s all your objective evidence.”

“In the first place, the beginnings are obscure. Why would the feudal lord of Tenang attack the peasants? The marching peasants were large in number, and he should’ve known what would happen if he used violence on them. Furthermore, there should have been a temporary levy going on, but there exists no records of that. Just where did all the stolen goods go? There are too many points of uncertainty.”

“Hmph, not a problem. The feudal lord probably used it all to enrich his own lifestyle. That man only thought about himself.”

The Secretary didn’t agree, and he threw down the documents, unable to keep up with the Chief Secretary’s farce.

“The biggest point of doubt is why the peasants raised the flag of the Liberation Army in Tenang after the uprising. Who had possession of a battleflag? The events went too favorable. It’s almost like the Liberation Army went into Belta knowing that—-”

The Chief violently slapped the desk, cutting off the Secretary’s words.

“Shut up! Listen, I don’t care if you’re here or not, I have plenty of replacements for you. If you won’t agree, then leave this job right now. I need don’t people like you who still have attachments to the former Kingdom!”

“How stupid. I’d prefer that a hundred times over writing a fabricated history. I’ll be excusing myself. Good for you that you can write your fabled history then. Aim for a country that stands a thousand years? It’ll be lucky to even survive a hundred.”

“You bastard, you know what’s going to happen to you right-!?”

“Please feel free. At this age, I don’t have any attachments to this world. Your threats don’t scare me.”

Tearing and throwing away the compiled documents, the old Secretary departed from the room.
After violently closing the door, he sighed with a somber expression on his face.

“History is written by the winners–and so nothing will change. It’s important to study from and reflect on history, and not repeat the same mistakes. Why can’t that be understood.”

The expressions of passing officers were all cheerful. All was good and fine now, but one day, they would probably repeat the same mistakes once more.
That was why an accurate history had to be written, to also leave a warning. Why didn’t they understand that.
They didn’t try to understand.

“……Perhaps it’s not that they won’t change, it’s that they can’t change. And so they

foolishly repeat their mistakes. How absolutely futile.”

A portrait of Altura decorated the Royal Palace’s hall.
—-Would nothing really change in the end? While praying that his own fears would end as needless anxiety, he gazed at the painting of their symbol of hope.

During the celebratory festival, Diener had conducted a meeting with the influentials of Royal Capital Blanca.
He was returning back to the Royal Palace, and nearby he had brought along his armed agents. There was a reason why it was so risky that he even had to attach guards to himself.
The other day, the hideous corpse of the turncoat general Octavio was discovered.
In addition, in the barracks teeming with soldiers, he was found in his office which was under strict guard.
It seemed Octavio had suffered agonizing torture, and he had died a horrifying death beyond description.
Diener imposed a strict gag order and searched for the criminal. But, the investigation wasn’t going well.
There was no human in the New Kingdom who would seem to benefit from killing Octavio now that he had lost his political power. Was it a murderer killing indiscriminately under the grips of madness? Or was there some kind of grudge?
Either way, this was a worrying matter.
Consequently, the guards attached to key figures of the New Kingdom were further reinforced as a precautionary measure.

“……I don’t where that lunatic came from, but that way of killing is unlike the work of a human’s. Was it the Devil or—-

Death.”

Whispered Diener, and sudden chills ran down his spine.
This was the main street of the Royal Capital. The figures of people that had been here earlier were no longer. Late at night though it may be, it was unnatural.
The taverns were still open, and there should be customers. There had even been a depressing amount of inviting prostitutes. The current situation was one that would never happen in the pleasure quarters late at night. So why.
The fog deepened. Before he knew it, a heavy fog that couldn’t be thought natural had sprung forth all around him.
The disguised Diener was wearing light clothes a merchant would wear. For weapons, he only had a dagger concealed between under his clothes.
Sensing himself in peril, Diener snapped his fingers, giving the signal to the agents hidden nearby.
He looked around, and gave the signal once more.

“Someone! Respond!”

He tried calling out directly in a loud voice.

……No response. Was there no one here? Diener heightened his vigilance.
In the fog in front of him, a black silhouette began to appear.

"It's useless. I've killed everyone. You're the only one left."

A high-pitched voice like a female's addressed him.

"W, who's there!? Agents, kill this person! Someone! Can't you hear me!?"

Diener panicked and called out to the bodyguards around him. There was no response from anyone.

"I've killed that trash Octavio, so I thought I'd get my revenge on you afterwards. I've come all the way here, just for you."

A short human silhouette appeared in the fog, and one more shadow–an inhuman monster, clad in black, tattered robes and carrying a large scythe.
The girl and Death's two shadows approached Diener.

"D-D-Death God, Schera Zade! Y, you're still living-!?"

"I got something to eat again and got better. Ah, so delicious. A taste I'd never tire of no matter how many times I've had it. …… Come now, shall we start? Vander's gone and waiting ahead for you."

"Va, Vander? Y-you, don't tell me, you ate Vander!? You madwoman-!"

Screamed Diener in question, and Schera smiled in rejection.

"What I ate was a more different *thing*. Also, I don't eat humans. Doesn't that just sound all kinds of disgusting?"

"D-Don't fuck with me! Return to Hell, you cheater of death-!"

Diener drew his dagger and pointed it at Death. He couldn't die here.
This was the beginning. He would aid Altura, carry out a righteous regime, and make the New Kingdom flourish.
He didn't want to die. He was scared of dying. Wasn't this the start of where he would seize prosperity? It was for that sake he had worked and wagered his everything. He had smeared himself in filth and stuck it out to the end.
Until he built the foundation, the foothold for his thousand-year Kingdom, he couldn't die. There was no way he could die.

"Fufu-, your face says you really don't want to die. But, it'll be alright. I'll help you want to die."

The thrusted, naked blade was easily intercepted by Death. Diener put more strength in, desperately trying to make something happen. He clenched his teeth.

"I can't die yet! I will live until I build the foundation for the New Kingdom! So I will —-"

"No-no. I had decided that I would to kill you. Don't think you'll die comfortably. I'll take my time, and slo~wly finish you off. Cry as much as you want. You don't need to hold back 'kay?"

"Don't you get it!? If you kill me, all the paid sacrifices up until now will be rendered

worthless! If it's me, I can save several thousands, no, several tens of thousands-"

"Silence."

As if to say he was hurting her ears, she grabbed Diener's dagger, and took it away.
Death dripped red blood.
She stroke her prey's face with wet hands. She stabbed a knife into his shoulder.
Diener screamed in pain.

"—-Guaaaaaa-!"

"One dirtied, ten sacrificed, and a thousand saved, said Vander. That was your teaching right?"

She brought her face as close as she could to Diener's. She looked straight at him with "eyes" swirling with madness, hatred, and bloodthirst.

"H-Hih-!"

"Just my opinion, but to end it was just one dirtied is kind of unfair. So…"

"S, stop-!"

Schera and Death's shadow overlapped, and became one. She took out a crude, small sickle from her waist.
She smiled at her sacrifice, and Death began her work.

—-Several hours later, when the thick fog cleared from the main street, there was Diener, a ruin of what he once was.
A manner of death exactly the same as Octavio. His face in death was far from peaceful.

Tactician Diener, the key figure behind their victory in the Liberation War, died an unnatural death without witnessing the growth of the New Kingdom.
Officially, he was treated as having died due to an accident, and Death never appeared in the Royal Capital afterwards.
Altura mourned Diener's death and held a large funeral ceremony. The seat of Prime Minister prepared for him would be left vacant for the time being.
The death of their mastermind hit Altura extremely hard. In this most important time, a reliable person had disappeared.
It was written in the Chronicles of the Liberation War that the tactician was rich in decisiveness, abundant in wit, and overflowing with loyalty, and was an exemplar counsellor who supported his Queen from the shadows.
The reality aside, it was true that he was acknowledged by the people of that time.
Whether the person himself was satisfied with that or not, only he would know.

As the New Yuze Kingdom lead by Altura took an affirmative stance on polytheism, the Star Church gradually began to see her as hostile.
The deciding factor came when the large amount of monetary donations started by Kristoff were put to an end. The Star Church announced the repealment of their protection.
Thereafter, their relationship completely deteriorated. Altura found herself in an awkward situation, branded a heretic by the Star Church.
Also, infighting between the bigwigs of the former Kingdom and the New Kingdom intensified, and Altura was forced to suffer at the helm all that.
Those that Diener had forcefully suppressed instantly rose up.
Politics was a choice of give-and-take. A world where everyone could be happy doesn't even exist
Caught between her dreams and reality, she distressed, suffered, and finally despaired, and she fell sick due to anxiety.
She left the world at a young age of 30, and her young, eldest son under the guardianship of Alan became the new King after her.
It seemed the disputes between fellow statesmen had settled for the meantime, but this was the era of intensifying antagonism towards national interests, religion, and race.
What Altura aimed for, a world where no one had to suffer, where everyone could have hope, was a far off reality.

After thirty years passed, when the memories of the Liberation War grew hazy, history repeated itself.
The New Kingdom hadn't reached that of a thousand years.
After the death of Alan, who managed substantially government affairs, the Empire strengthened its activities and once again applied pressure that it would swallow up the Kingdom.
The Kingdom gave into its threats and accepted various demands, and the finances of the Kingdom began to grow dire.
To compensate, they were forced to once again raise the lowered taxes temporarily.
Many lords took the opportunity to declare independence in opposition to the Kingdom's effeminate policies, and the Kingdom was again thrown into a state of civil war.
And the fatal blow was when the Kingdom arbitrarily carried out a policy oppressing the Star Church: they recklessly imposed a Religion Tax.
"Every believer must offer a fixed amount of money to the Kingdom. Your faith in the Kingdom will then be guaranteed."
In response to the Kingdom's called-upon persecution, the Star Church declared separation from the New Kingdom.
"Oppose the the unjust persecution, and wipe out the heretics with armed force," was the edict handed down to all believers.
As a result, it became a frequent occurrence where adherents of the Star Church would make armed uprisings within the Kingdom. Influential lords also joined in their groups, and armed uprisings finally became a full-on revolution.
This was the end of the temporary peace.

—-Cyrus Castle, with black smoke rising from it.
In front of a nameless tombstone covered in moss, was a lone female officer. She wasn't there to pray. She merely observed it, staring unwaveringly, and seemingly very intrigued.
A sorceror wrapped in pink robes approached the female officer. Her robe had the emblem of the Star Church emblazoned on it.
As her face was concealed by the hood, it was hard to tell, but her sickly pale neck peeked through.

"Your Excellency. You might you be looking at?"

"Just looking at this. I heard there was something interesting here so I've been looking for it. It seems to be my grave, this thing."

The female officer took out a book and threw it to the sorceror. 'Chronicles of the Liberation War' was written on it.
After having a look at its contents, the sorcerer hmph'ed in displeasure; flames welled up from her hands and incinerated the book in a second.

"This kind of worthless book shouldn't exist in this world. It's a vulgar book with liberal fabrications. Please be at ease, I will put together Your Excellency's history one day."

It would be something magnificent, glorious, and mind-boggling, she thought, but she didn't vocalize it.
If she accidentally let it out, before it became famous, it would all be over before it even began.

"Despite being dead, you're quite hot-blooded. Is that just how it is, I wonder?"

"Sir. That is how it is. After I've gotten this body, my brutal side has more or less increased."

I see, whispered the female officer, and she stood up, swung her scythe, and pulverized the gravestone.
She didn't need such sham made by trash. There was something more appropriate for them after all.

"Your face looks quite refreshed. And with your complexion so bad too."

"If Your Excellency weren't here, I would've done it."

Under her hood, she pushed up her glasses. Here lips were sharply bent.

"If I left it to you, even the fortress would've been blown away, so I did it. This is my treasured home after all."

She brushed back her brownish hair that was longer than before and stretched. The

wind was refreshing, and the sunlight warm.
Good produce would surely grow. Even if they were to wither, even if they were burned to the ground, they could just plant more.

"……You'll stay here, after the battles end?"

"Mhm. I have to keep my promise with them. I'll make a field of potatoes that'll cover the fortress. The harvested potatoes will be enjoyed by me and my comrades. Since you're dead, I wonder if you won't partake?"

She made an impish smile, and the sorcerer looked sour.

"I am Your Excellency's adjutant. Of course I would love to partake. I would follow you to the ends of the earth."

"But, the dead don't feel hungry right? I heard that long ago."

"No, they do. I get even more hungry because I'm dead. I know, because I've died."

"Is that so. That's a new discovery. Then I'll give you these."

She took out two walnuts from a cloth bag and handed them to the sorcerer—-a sorcerer of the dead.

"T, thank you very much!"

The sickly looking woman happily began rolling them in her hand with a smile on her face.

"If I'm not careful, you'll be rolling something else immediately. I thought I told you to stop; it's a bad habit."

"P-please excuse me."

"How many times do I have to say it I wonder."

A messenger clothed in black priest's robes came along to these two who were having a light-hearted conversation.

"Your Excellency! Preparations to sortie are in order!"

"—-Got it. Tell Veloce we'll be there shortly." (Note: Pronounciation)

"Sir-!"

Veloce Gael lead black heavy infantry and was a female officer who had inherited her grandfather's rough disposition.
She would probably have a large influence in this battle too, as the successor of the Indomitable Yalder.

Seeing the messenger run off, the necromancer spoke up.

"And so it ends, maybe."

"No, it only begins. The massacre of those guys of the 'rebel army.' We'll be busy."

“Please leave it to me. I’ll make it up to you for that time.”

“I’m expectant. If you want, you should take command with Veloce. I’m not suited towards such things.”

“……I will decline. I feel like I excused myself before too though.”

“Really? Can’t be helped then.”

Her mantle fluttering, Death shouldered her scythe and began calmly walking.
After her followed the necromancer reverentially. And behind them, their bodies covered in black armor, marched ranks of her Martyrs.

Death casually looked at the sky, and a white crow was circling the top tower.
A black battleflag with a white crow coat of arms triumphantly waved atop it.

“It seems like, there won’t be a third time.”

Death smiled in sheer happiness.

The New Yuze Kingdom wasn’t as strong as their days in the Liberation War, and the families of the chief generals and the royal family were all killed.
The bloodline of the Yuze Kingdom had completely come to an end.
The families of heroes too, chiefly Behrouz and Fynn, were practically wiped out.
The grandchildren of the heroes who fought for the people, were ironically killed by those very people.
The armed uprising of adherents of the Star Church spread to the Empire and the Union too, and the Mundo Novo continent fell into a state much like a cauldron of hell.
Conflict over hegemony broke out under the banner of the Star Church, and it became an era where rival warlords sought to expand their territory. It seemed there was still some way to go before the advent of a peaceful era.

Also, in a group of the Star Believers' Revolution, there was someone said to have looked like the 'Death God,' but details are entirely unclear.
It was only written down in Star Church documents that a young female general weilding a scythe and her black cavalry had made accomplishments none other could match.
After obtaining control over the Royal Capital, it was only recorded that she and her troops disappeared somewhere. The name of the female general was not left behind.
Though, a strange anecdote remained that the night before all news of them was cut off, there was a bustling celebration held in the ruins of a certain estate.

—-Death, keeps her promises.

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